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Waiting for Tidings.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WHITE AND BLACK."

VOL. II.

HENRY S. KING & Co.,
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1874.

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Waiting for Tidings.

CHAPTER I.

CAGED.

MARGARET had, in the meantime, been growing daily more impatient and anxious for news. She was closely guarded by Mrs. Flint, who never allowed her to leave the house, or even stay alone in any of the ground-floor rooms, being quite indifferent to the fact that the poor girl was still too lame to attempt any escape. So she could only stand at an upper window, and strain her eyes over the far distance, and wonder how soon Jesse would find her out, as she had no doubt he would. Each morning she rose with the hope that he would come that day; and she lay awake long into the night, listening for his whistle under the window.

She had remained there eight days, when her trunks containing her wardrobe arrived

from Sandmouth. She was startled at this mark of consideration, for it seemed to imply she was to stay longer where she was. She unpacked the trunks, however, very eagerly, hoping to find in them writing materials, which Mrs. Flint had refused to give her. Hidden amongst the clothes she discovered a letter from Green, and in reading it, she first became aware of the real anxieties of her position. Green had written in the greatest distress : she blamed herself unsparingly for May's intimacy with Jesse, and then continued,—

“My poor dear, your uncles cannot settle whether you shall be married over again or not, because they don't want to let him have your money ; but mind, my dear child, whatever they say, you hold fast to Jesse now, and be married to him again to make it all right, or you will never be happy. And try and be a good wife, to make amends to everybody. I shall never see you again, as I am going to America, and James too. The people here say you and Jesse are drowned, and your uncle won't let us say you are not. Mr. Freeman is gone away, and they say he will be ruined.”

Margaret grew nearly wild with fright after reading this letter. If Jesse had not been heard of by any one in Sandmouth, it seemed as if some accident had happened to him. Was he ill, that he did not come to her? or was he in prison for helping her to run away? Her dread of the power of the law was in proportion to her ignorance of it; and she was ready to believe in any power of punishing Jesse, if her uncle chose to do so. She had already begun to entertain serious misgivings that perhaps she was not, after all, legally married. She had no confidence in Josiah, who had arranged it all, and she knew Jesse was ignorant like herself. If he were at liberty, she thought he would by now have found out where she was, and forced an entrance into the house, or scaled the garden wall; and as he had not done so, she was sure he was in prison, or very ill, too ill to come. Either supposition was heart-breaking, and she implored and entreated Mrs. Flint, as she had never entreated and begged before, to let her write to him, or at least to her uncle. But even to this last request, Flint was

•

inexorable; no tears, no passion, could move her; and May was growing almost frantic with fear and distress, when Mr. Halton came down to Dunstable. She did not wait to be summoned to his presence, but hurried into the room, exclaiming in breathless excitement,—

“I want to know where my husband is. Is he ill? You must tell me that. He must be ill, as he does not write. Oh! uncle, uncle, tell me! I know you have bad news to tell,” she cried, wringing her hands in terror at his silence.

“He is quite well,” said Mr. Halton at length. “But I have something to tell you, which will grieve you far more than any illness could.”

“Do you mean that we are not really married?” May asked, thinking of Green’s letter. “We did not mean to do wrong, but we can be married over again, cannot we?”

“I shall be glad almost if it is not a legal marriage,” said Mr. Halton, “for he has committed a crime, which would make him a felon if it were known; and all we can do for your sake, Margaret,” he continued sternly,

for breathless wonder kept her silent, "is to hide the proofs carefully, and enable him to leave this country. This we have done for your sake ; if we had let the law take its chance, he would have been transported."

"What has he done?" gasped May. "Is it for marrying me? Transported!"

"Do you know what forgery is?" asked her uncle.

"Yes ; I know. It is a great crime ; but we have not done that in being married, have we? Oh we cannot have done it. I thought it was about money."

"Yes, it is, child. It is signing another man's name to a written promise to pay money, and then using that for money," said Mr. Halton, feeling himself almost bewildered by her childish ignorance.

"But he never has done that. I know he has not ; he would call that stealing," cried May, indignantly.

"It is stealing," said Mr. Halton. "And he has done it, and he could be transported for it."

"He has not ! It's not true !" cried May, in a passion of unbelief. But her uncle cut her short

by placing before her Edward's letter from Enderby, telling the facts of the forgery, and especially dilating on the perfect resemblance between Jesse's handwriting and his uncle's.

May read, and gathered the general sense of it, and stood dumb with terror.

"I never signed my name to that bill," Mr. Halton, said sternly. "Your husband wrote it; his brother has confessed it; and you know if he could write like me or not."

"Yes, I know he could," faltered May. "I taught him to write so."

"You taught him the way to ruin, then," said Mr. Halton. "He is guilty of felony, and he would be found guilty, and be transported, if I did not, for your sake, mean to pass it over, and let him escape the consequences of his crime."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" cried May, falling on her knees in an agony of tears. "I will be so grateful, oh so grateful. Oh, I know he did not do it of his own free will. Josiah must have made him do it; he must indeed."

"Probably he did; but the law would recognise the writer of my signature as the criminal," said Mr. Halton. "But we have let him off—and let him go to America."

“And then may I go to him, and we will be married over again, cannot we?” said May, as she rose from her knees. Her uncle stared at her in blank astonishment.

“Go to him? go to him?” he cried at last, when his amazement gave way to anger. “A scoundrel! a forger! an unconvicted felon! Are you mad? No; even if your marriage were legal, I would not let you go. You must be too thankful you are saved from him.”

“Not go to him?” cried Margaret, divided between amazement and indignation. “But I’m his wife; I have promised to love him all my life, and you cannot keep me from him. You have no right.”

“I have a right to do so till you are of age, and I shall,” said her uncle. “Don’t be a fool. He married you for your money, and he does not love you.”

May hid her face in her hands, and sank on a chair. But her despair only lasted for a moment. She knew he could never forget her; and with all her strength and heart, she resolved that, if he should go to the ends of the earth, she would follow him. Her uncle might keep her shut up and guarded by Flint, but she would get

out of his power, and she would go after Jesse. "I will come, I will come, Jesse," she said in her heart; and to her excited fancy it seemed as if she saw him there listening to her promise. The vision was distinct and real in her eyes, and, as she saw it, a new strength and courage rose in her.

Mr. Halton had walked to the window, to escape the sight of her grief, but when he came back she had grown suddenly calm and self-possessed. With the stubborn self-control that had conquered even Flint, and made her sometimes even civil to her prisoner, she now subdued all signs of her agitation in her uncle's presence. She had still much of the child in her, and children have often as much power of hiding emotion as grown women, either because they have less capability of putting it into words, or because they are unconscious that their outward calmness deceives nobody. At the present time, Mr. Halton knew his niece was acting a part when she looked suddenly submissive and quiet; but he mistook the origin of her self-command,—attributing it to pride, and certainly not to a secret resolution to out-

wit him, so he was glad that she should keep her crying till he was gone.

"I have a letter from him, and one for you," he said; thinking he might as well do all he had to do at once.

"For me! Oh, give it me—quick!" cried May, springing up, again wild with agitation; and she stood trembling with joy and fear, while Mr. Halton produced his pocket-book, and took out the letter.

"This was sent——" he began; but she seized it, and read it, unheeding all he said in explanation.

"MY DEAR WIFE,—They tell me I have done a great crime, and I ought to be transported; but, my darling, you must believe my word, when I tell you, dear, I never meant to do it; and knew no more about it when I did it than you do. And they say we are not lawfully married; which I cannot understand. But they say they can transport me if I stop in England; and I must promise never to claim you for my wife; which I never would do, dear, if I was to

be a disgrace to you, and you did not love me. You will believe my word, and believe I am innocent—as indeed I am. And I think, dear, the marriage was a good one,—least-ways in God's eyes we are married. And you must believe me innocent, my darling, as I would take your word against all the world, if they said anything against you. We are on board now—sailing for America. God bless you my sweet one.

“Your true husband,

“JESSE.”

“And there,” said Mr. Halton, laying another letter on the table; “there is his letter to me, promising never to claim you.”

This singular communication ran,—

“SIR,—you say I must promise never to come and claim your niece as my wife. If I could come without your transporting me, I would not give her up; but I don't want to disgrace her; so I promise never to claim her nor ask for any of her money—which I never thought of doing.”

The sight of this apparent renunciation of her, did not affect May as her uncle meant it should. She was intent only on his letter to herself. She saw in that the unanswerable proof of his innocence; and her eyes shone with such triumphant joy, that Mr. Halton would have been amazed, if he could have seen their expression through her tears. But he only waited for her to read the letters, before he began to speak again.

"So he is gone, you see, and will never come back to claim you. Why he should have been such an idiot as to commit this crime when he had succeeded, or thought he had, in getting hold of you and your money, I can't think. But they say, 'give a rogue rope enough, and he will hang himself.'"

May's self-command and affected submission gave way. "I won't hear him spoken of so. He is my husband, and he is innocent; and I will not hear you speak so of him."

"You must hear what I please to say, Margaret," replied John Halton, sternly. "Because you have formed a very disgraceful connection with this man, is no reason why

I should spare your feelings in speaking of him. He is a scoundrel, and an uneducated boor besides; and I cannot understand how my sister's child can possibly have let him so infatuate her. It is a good thing your mother is dead; it would have broken her heart to see you so disgraced; and there is no one of us who would not think it better if you were really drowned, as they think you are in Sandmouth and Enderby."

May was crying bitterly now, at this allusion to her mother; but she heard what her uncle added.

"It is my intention to try and hide your disgrace from the world, if I can, for your sake and my own, and my brother's daughters, who would be injured if your folly and wickedness were known. You must stay here, and I shall tell Flint you are never to go out of the house."

"Oh, may not I go into the garden?" May asked piteously. "Oh please let me. I shall be ill if I stay always in the house—though I don't care if I am ill," she continued defiantly; "but I am too lame to try to run away. Please let me go out sometimes."

Her uncle looked doubtful, and left the room ; and immediately afterwards, she heard him saying to another person, " I do not believe anything about the lameness ; it is probably all put on to deceive me."

To which another voice replied, " No ; Flint says she is really lame ; and she could not be seen by any one, when she is in the back garden ; for the wall is high. Shall you remember, Flint, that she must neither be seen or even heard of in the village ?"

" You are right, Edward," said Mr. Halton. ' You hear, Flint, she is never to go outside the gate—never."

" And she must never be seen at a window," said Edward, " never by any chance. She will have to go to a convent in France if you can't take care of her, Mrs. Flint ; do you understand ?"

Mrs. Flint said, " Yes," and took Edward to see the back garden.

May went to the window, and saw Edward looking at the walls, and making himself sure there was no gate or means of exit but through the house, and she heard him

give redoubled cautions to Mrs. Flint to watch her well. She thought he was more to be hated even than her uncle.

"It was he who advised him to bring me here. It is he who makes him call Jesse wicked. Oh, how I hate him!" she cried aloud. "I wish he were dead. I wish Jesse could meet him, and throw him off Three Ashes Cliff."

She stopped after this burst of childish rage, as contrasting her slight, delicate cousin with Jesse, she laughed hysterically at the idea of the hopeless inferiority of Edward, could he be for one moment in a hand-to-hand struggle with the sailor.

Only when her uncle and cousin were fairly gone, Margaret gave way to her sorrow, and wept uncontrollably. The prospect of a long imprisonment was difficult enough to bear, but it was nothing compared with the thought of the distance that separated her from Jesse. She had been sustained hitherto by the trust that he would find her, and that the law would give him power to take her from her guardian. She had married him with this

idea, that he would be able to protect her from John Halton, and had been comforted by this belief during all this weary fortnight of uncertainty and alarm. It had supported her under Mrs. Flint's insolence and the miserable sense of imprisonment, and now she knew that he had had to leave her; that he was a thousand miles away, and could not return; and she passed her time helplessly crying and bemoaning herself.

But at last hope came again. She re-read the precious letter from Jesse again and again; and with it in her hands, she began to take comfort. She read in it no offer on his part to give her up; he seemed to be like herself, in doubt as to whether they were legally married or not; but he reminded her that their marriage was a true one before Heaven, and in these words she read an appeal to her to follow him. And she told herself she would do so. She repeated her promise to go after him over and over again to herself; and between her fits of crying, and despair, she tried to think how she was to escape and go to America. But at present

even she saw it was an utter impossibility, she was too securely imprisoned under Flint's cruel guardianship; and the few words that had dropped from Edward about the convent abroad, frightened her from making any effort to escape, unless she could be certain of success; for it was better to remain a prisoner with Mrs. Flint for weeks, even for months, than run any risk of being taken to France. Little as she realised the true difficulties, and almost impossibility, of reaching Liverpool or any seaport, and getting on a vessel leaving England, without being retaken by her uncle, she knew she must have money to travel with, and that she must be able to walk if occasion needed it; and therefore, till her foot was strong again, she could not attempt any escape. But at her age ideas of time are not very definite, and the immediate future shrinks into littleness, compared with the long roll of years to follow; and she talked to herself of waiting a few months before rejoining Jesse, with a philosophy she could not have commanded had she been four years older. She resolved to be

patient, and if possible look cheerful, so as to make Mrs. Flint suppose she was content to remain with her, and meantime to find some means of escape.

But after several hours spent in castle-building, her courage would desert her, and she would cry for the rest of the day.

Flint gave her prisoner permission to walk in the garden, but May did not care for the privilege. She had longed to get out before, thinking she might find a letter from Jesse thrown over the wall; but now that she knew he was far away on the wide sea, she had no motive for going out into the snow and frost. She thought she had better consult her weak ankle, and by constant rest cure the lameness that made her so easy a prisoner.

Her hours and days wore away sadly and slowly. She had looked forward to some relenting on her guardian's part in a few weeks, but two months dragged themselves wearily on, and he seemed still resolved to leave her where she was, or he had forgotten her. She wanted to write to him, but Flint refused to let her send a letter to him, and

treated her with an insolence that almost made her frantic with the sense of her helplessness. She would have broken down in despair, and wept herself ill, but for the secret hope that Jesse might brave the danger that threatened him in England, and return and find her out in her place of captivity. If he could once find her, she had no doubt he would be able to take her away. She had unlimited faith in his power of overcoming obstacles, and she looked on the fact of her ankle being now strong again as a proof that she would be able to effect her escape. She thought the high walls of the garden would not keep her in long if he were once there to direct her flight. She spent whole hours walking round and round the little enclosure, and exercised herself in running that she might be ready for the day of escape.

Afterwards she saw it would be wise to conciliate Flint, and make her, if possible, a friend. Till now she had avoided her company as much as possible, preferring to stay all day upstairs in her own bedroom, even

when Flint refused to light a fire in it, to being near her. But now she came down and sat in the kitchen, mending some fine handkerchiefs; and one evening, saying she had no more work to do for herself, she offered to help the housekeeper with hers. Mrs. Flint was surprised, but did not reject the proposal; and, won over by a secret admiration for the superior skill of her companion, became somewhat gracious and even kindly in demeanour.

"Where did you learn to work so beautiful, miss? It's not often young ladies knows how to work as is of any use," she asked one evening, in a tone that was meant to be both kind and respectful.

Margaret felt the opportunity had come for telling her tale to Flint in her own way, and pleading her own cause.

"I had nothing else to amuse myself with before I was married, and afterwards I had to make all my table linen and curtains for our cottage," she replied with an emphasis on the word married, that apprized her listener there was to be no ignoring that fact. "Our

cottage was furnished in a hurry. I had everything to do after I was married."

"Had you really gone to housekeeping, then?" asked Flint, her curiosity getting the better of her. "I suppose you thought of getting married some day?"

"We were married in the parish church," replied May, quietly, for she had rehearsed her part in the approaching conversation; "and I had my wedding ring on, when Mr. Halton came and took me away from my home; but Mr. Edward Halton took it away from me, and I suppose will keep it."

"Your wedding ring? took it away? Well I never!" replied Flint. "Then you was really married, and in church. I had not never the least idea of it. And when do you suppose your husband will make it up with your uncle, ma'am?"

"I don't know," said Margaret sadly, "never, I suppose." And as the kindlier tone fell on her ear, her forced self-command gave way, and the tears came freely.

From that time Mrs. Flint began to be as indulgent as her nature allowed, and tried, in

every way she could devise, to make her captivity less painful to her. She sent to the neighbouring town for a newspaper, and brought silks and wools for embroidery. But the weary girl would not look at these; her whole soul was fixed on the chance of escaping from England, and joining her husband in America. She assured herself again and again she would soon be with him. She resolved, as if in defiance of her uncle, to prepare for her journey. She even commenced a dozen shirts for Jesse's wardrobe, stitching them with as much energy and perseverance as if their completion were necessary for the success of her projects of escape. Mrs. Flint watched her, and shook her head. "Poor thing! it will be long ere them shirts be worn by him they's made for. Poor thing! poor young thing!"

The spring passed into summer, and still Margaret hoped, till hope deferred made her heart sick. She listened in the still night, lying with her window open, for the sound of some foot upon the garden walk. She knew it was foolish to hope. He dared not return; he would be arrested as soon as he reached Eng-

land, but yet in the hours when sleep was dropping upon her, while reason was beginning to slumber, while imagination was still awake, she waited, expecting the whistle or low call that ought to come sooner or later. Then, overcome with fatigue, she dropped asleep, to dream he had come, and was waiting in the garden; and waked in the morning, knowing before she waked, that it was all a dream, and that her happiness was lasting only so long as she could keep her eyes shut and her sense stupified, and that she only waked to wretchedness and waiting.

“Then said she, ‘I am very dreary,
He cometh not,’ she said;
She said, ‘I am a weary, weary;
I would that I were dead.’”

But when the west wind, soft and damp, blew among the green branches of the elm-trees, she looked eagerly towards it, as if there were a message coming with it over the wide Atlantic, telling her to follow him and fear not. “I am coming,” she answered; “oh, I will come, Jesse. I will never give up.” And then she cried out in a fit of misery and des-

pair, "Oh, when will they let me out? Am I to stay here always till I die?"

In the meantime her affairs were giving her uncle continual and increasing uneasiness. His investigations had settled the point that her marriage, though irregular, was a legal one, and that therefore they might regret having let Jesse Freeman go out of England, instead of compelling him, by dread of prosecution for forgery, to settle the bulk of her property on herself. The error could not be repaired, for it was plain he would refuse to return to England unless the prosecution was given up, and the evidence in the shape of the forged bill destroyed. And now that there was no doubt he was legally her husband, Mr. Halton could not prosecute him without involving himself, to a certain degree, in the disgrace. The only course to pursue was to conciliate him, promise to conceal the forgery, and by the offer of a present liberal income, induce him to make some separate provision for Margaret out of her own inheritance. But even this was at present impossible, for Mr. Halton heard from Josiah, who still remained in

America, that his brother had been so excited and unreasonable, and so determined to return to England, that he had been afraid to leave him in New York, and had persuaded him to go a voyage with one of his friends, and he was now gone to China. On hearing this, Mr. Halton felt himself sorely perplexed, and could only devoutly hope the ship would go to pieces in the next gale. Josiah had not come back to England, but had written to his wife to save what she could from the ruin of his business, and join him in the United States, so that there was no power of making a hostage of him, for his brother's good behaviour.

Worse than all, the time arrived when the forged bill became due, and Mr. Halton had to decide between making it public, and rendering it impossible for Jesse to return to England, or to accept it as genuine, and by retiring it, hush the whole matter up, and destroy all evidence of the crime. It was an awkward dilemma, and Mr. Halton could see but one way out of it. He saved the family honour for the time being, retired the bill, and trusted that some typhoon in the China seas would

spare him the necessity of ever acknowledging Jesse Freeman as his nephew. It might be possible, if he returned alive, to persuade him to go another voyage, and so a second chance might be gained.

It was suggested by Edward that Josiah Freeman should be given an interest in thus keeping his brother away, and Mr. Halton wrote and told Josiah he would pay him a hundred pounds a year as long as Jesse remained in America, and kept silent as to his marriage. The offer of one hundred pounds was increased to two, and Josiah promised to do what he could.

All this John Halton told his brother Theodore when he came back to England in August, leaving his wife and daughters still in Paris. "And now our main hope is he will die, or be drowned," John concluded. "I have done all I can."

"And how is she? Does she fret, or is she reasonable?" asked Dr. Halton.

"I don't know. I hear she is well," said John; "and I think it best to have as little to do with her as possible."

"When did you see her last?" asked Theodore, opening the desk, where he had left his keys seven months before.

"I have not seen her at all. Flint writes me word about her every month."

"You have not seen her, John, at all!" said Dr. Halton in surprise. "You have surely not left her there all this time, and never gone to see her! Who is with her?"

"Flint. Why should I go and make myself angry? There is no good in talking to her that I see. She is a headstrong, obstinate girl; and it is better to leave her quiet till we know what we are going to do."

"I thank God my daughters are not under your care," replied Dr. Halton, indignantly. "You ought to have gone. I wish Edward had been in England; he would have seen after her. I wish I could go to her to-morrow, but I cannot leave town these three days; I will send for the woman." And Dr. Halton wrote to Flint, and summoned her to come to London.

Mrs. Flint came to Margaret, who was working diligently, and said,—

"If I go up to your uncle, will you promise to keep in the house, and not let any one see you, just as if I was at home. I shall ask your uncle if you may not go out for a walk sometimes with me."

"Oh, do go and ask him!" responded Margaret eagerly. "I will keep in the house, and keep the blinds down while you are gone, I promise you."

"I should think," continued Flint, "that if you was allowed to go out in the village, you could make up your mind not to tell any one you was married, and never let them think anything why you was locked up here."

"Oh no. I would not indeed," cried Margaret, catching eagerly at a hope of liberty. "I would keep it a secret from everybody if Mr. Halton wished." And she thought to herself, if she were once allowed to walk into the village, she could buy paper and pens, and write either to Mrs. Josiah, at Sandmouth, or to Yarmouth to Sam or Betty, and learn where, in America, to write to Jesse. "I will not tell any one I am married," she replied to Flint unhesitatingly.

"I thought you would say so ; it's reasonable; and I don't see as how you need be shut up here. I'm sure I'm tired of keeping you locked in; and I don't see why you should not be out for a walk every day with me, or by yourself for that matter."

May's heart beat so fast at this prospect of liberty, that she was afraid Flint would discover her intense excitement. She gave the required promise, and Flint went to London, and found her way to Mr. Halton's counting-house, nearly frightening that gentleman out of his wits by the supposition that she had some disastrous news to communicate.

"Not run away? not ill you say? All safe, did you not say, Mrs. Flint? She has not made the disgraceful story public, has she?"

"Oh dear no, sir; nothing of the kind. Run away! not she. She is as quiet as a lamb; and as for making the story public, sir, she is as willing to keep it a secret as you could wish, sir. And if she was let go out and talk to other people, I'm cer-

tain she would be too sensible to let any one suspect what she was locked up for."

"She is safer shut up away from any one," said Mr. Halton; "much" safer. It would not do to trust her. It would not be safe to trust her."

"I don't know that it would not be the wisest course, John," said Dr. Halton, who had sat listening, with his eyes very wide open, and beating time to Mrs. Flint's sentences with his gold pencilcase. "We can't keep the girl mewed up in the house much longer. People will begin to talk, and make surmises, and if she is ready to promise to keep the whole story a secret, it is a sign she recognises the disgrace and obloquy that would attend the suspicion of her folly."

"And oh, sir," said Flint, turning to him as a more hopeful point of attack, "if you saw the poor thing, so quiet and so gentle, you would think it was a charity to let her go out into the fields, and see the village, and the school-children, and anything to take her mind off him."

"I think I would like to see the girl my-

self, and then I might judge," said Dr. Theodore to his brother. "I could draw some inference from her manner and general way of speaking."

"I strongly advise you not to trust to her in any way," said John. "She is a strange and evidently an unprincipled girl, and I don't think she would have a particle of regard for any promise she might make you."

"No; but she may have common sense enough to see it is wisest to keep the secret," said Dr. Theodore. "And since it seems there is happily no chance of our having, for her own sake, to acknowledge her marriage, she will acquiesce in the wisdom of keeping it buried in oblivion. I'll go down and see her myself. I would have done so before, if I had not been in France. I'll come the day after to-morrow, Mrs. Flint."

Mrs. Flint went home, and told Margaret her uncle was coming, and counselled her to show as much humility and goodness as she could, as he was disposed to grant her permission to come out.

"Now, Theodore, I warn you, she is a

strange girl, deceitful and cunning, and she will try and persuade you to let her do as she likes," said John Halton to his brother; "and in the present most unsatisfactory state of things——"

"Tell me what was the name of the ship Freeman sailed in; she will want to know that," said Dr. Theodore.

"The *Astoria*, of Newport, John Sumner captain and owner," said John, after consulting a letter from Josiah Freeman, which was carefully stowed away in a cash-box marked private, and endorsed to that effect by a Brahmah lock. "He sailed in February from New York, and was bound for Hong Kong. That is all we know, and I see no use in telling her."

"She may like to know," said Theodore. "Now tell me what are the trains. I can't make it out in Bradshaw."

As it was two days before he went down to Dunstable, May had had time to think what she should say to her uncle, and had made up her mind to promise she would tell no one of her marriage, if he asked her to

do so. She hoped he would not also exact a promise not to run away; but if he did she could give it, and break it as soon as she saw a good opportunity. No promise to stay away from Jesse ought to bind her, she considered; and perhaps a more scrupulous conscience than hers would have absolved her and pronounced her justified, seeing that she was a prisoner, and therefore it might be considered any promise would be extorted by force.

Theodore Halton did not fail in his purpose of coming to see his niece. He arrived the day and the hour he had agreed to do, and, finding she was in the garden, he went to the window, and scrutinised her features as closely as he could, before he made her aware of his presence.

"I had no idea she was so good-looking," he said to Mrs. Flint; "and she has a nice broad forehead to show good sense; the mouth indicates temper, but it is very pretty. Dear me, she is very thin—dreadfully thin for so young a person, and the colour is hectic."

"That's what I say, sir. She will die if she's

shut up here much longer," said Mrs. Flint; and Dr. Halton, having put on his spectacles, from which he had been rubbing some troublesome moisture that had suddenly obscured them, walked out into the garden to his niece, who was working diligently at her endless task of wristbands and collars. Margaret looked up as his steps sounded on the gravel, and rose, and stood waiting, her eyes fixed on the ground, while she felt her whole face burning with a deep blush. She was determined to bear any amount of reproof, in the hope he would allow her to go out.

"I am your Uncle Theodore, Margaret," said Dr. Halton, in his very gentle tone; "and I thought if you and I had some conversation, we might come to a better understanding."

Margaret looked up in astonishment at this unexpected tone of kindness. She had fancied her Uncle Theodore would be the counterpart of John, only more dictatorial, as befitted the father of Edward; and when he took his seat on the bench, and motioned to her to sit beside him, she obeyed in silence, staring at him in wonder.

"You know, my dear child, that you have been very foolish," he began ; "and that what you have done would, if it were known, cause you great distress and sorrow all your life. I do not know if you realise the extent of that disgrace."

Margaret was quite confounded by his gentleness, and did not know what to answer ; but she thought she could not do wrong in agreeing with all he said, so she murmured, "Yes, I do." And he continued,—

"You think you do, I dare say ; but you are hardly old enough to fully realise how terrible would be your position and misery if the secret were known. The marriage was probably not a true one : do you know that ?"

"Oh yes, I know that," May replied. "But we thought it was real ; we did indeed."

"I know you did—at least, I believe you did," said Dr. Theodore, kindly. "You did not mean to do so very wrong, I am sure ; but you should have remembered we are your mother's brothers, and that your mother gave you into our charge."

"Please, don't!" said May, beseechingly.

"Please, don't. If I had seen *you*, I would never have run away; no, indeed I would not."

"Why, but you ran away to be married."

"Oh, but I never should have run away if Mr. Halton had not been going to take me away to a school, and I so begged him not—and I wanted to run away from him—and Josiah said I could not run away unless I was married," May added faintly.

"He said so? the villain!" muttered Dr. Halton—confounding Jesse with Josiah of course. "Poor child, deceived and inveigled! John was wrong about her. She has good feeling." And then he continued aloud, "My child, do you think that if you came home with me, to my house, you could keep this unfortunate marriage of yours a complete secret from every one? It would disgrace you, indeed it would, my dear, for ever, if it were known. Could you keep it a secret from all the world for always?"

"Yes; I could, I know," May answered, promptly. "I know I could if you wished."

"You see how important we have thought it

to hide it, by our bringing you here, and telling Mrs. Flint never to let you go out. It would be a dreadful humiliation to me and your Aunt Alice, if it were ever suspected, for I very much doubt if it is a legal marriage ; and if it were, it would be perhaps even more terrible to us. My own daughters would be very much injured, Margaret, by such a story being told of their cousin. You must consider well if you could keep the secret from every one. I place the honour of our family and the happiness of your cousins in your keeping."

"I can keep the secret, I know," said Margaret, firmly, satisfying her conscience with the reflection that she was giving no promise not to go after Jesse to America, and remembering that in her uncle's house she would probably learn news of him. She saw no reason for wanting to publish the fact of their marriage ; liberty to go to America was all she wanted.

Her uncle continued talking, emphasising the disgrace which it would cause them all if her elopement were ever known ; and it did not escape him that she was more im-

pressed with the idea that it would injure his daughters, than with anything he said of her own personal loss of position, should it ever be whispered aloud.

"Do Gertrude and Florence know about it?" she asked when he came to a pause. "Will you tell them from me I will keep it quite a secret?"

"They don't know it. God forbid!" said Dr. Halton, quickly; and she coloured with shame as she felt the extent of her supposed disgrace. It was, she knew, no real disgrace; and if she could once go to Jesse, she would not mind bearing it all. But she answered very humbly,—

"I am so sorry you have had so much trouble. If I had known what trouble I should give you, I would not have done it."

"I am sure you would not, my dear," said Theodore Halton, quite conquered by this sad, childlike humility. "And I will trust you, and you shall come home to me, and I will take you home to-day."

"Oh, you are so kind, so good!" cried Margaret, in a transport of joy and hope. "I

will go and get ready directly ; my trunks can come after, can't they ? Oh, but, uncle, shall I—shall I have to see Mr. John Halton ?”

Dr. Theodore looked at her flushed countenance, and said kindly, “ Not if you had rather not, my child. I am going to take you to my own house, and he rarely comes there, and you can keep out of his sight when he does.”

May wondered if she should meet Edward at her uncle's house, but she was too anxious to go there to make that a difficulty, and hurried away to make preparations for the journey. She was much moved by Dr. Theodore's kindness ; and felt rather unhappy as she remembered it would be of use to her only as it enabled her to escape from his care, and follow Jesse to America. “ But when I go, no one shall know why I go,” she said to herself. “ There shall be nothing suspected to injure Gertrude or Florence. I will manage it so that every one shall think I am dead, as they did at Sandmouth, and as Mr. Halton wished I was.”

CHAPTER II.

A SAILOR'S WIFE.

DR. HALTON carried his niece to London that same evening, astonishing the housekeeper at Murchison Square, by appearing with her and a pile of luggage, and saying she was going to live there with him. Anything more cheery and sociable than this housekeeper, May had never seen. She was a mulatto, very small and fat, and talked incessantly, and ruled her master with a rod of iron in all that related to the house and housekeeping, alleging always her absent mistress's orders, which were to make him comfortable in a way far better than he could suggest himself. However, as she was too prudent ever to disturb his papers and specimens, he never found courage to grumble, and agreed with his wife in considering Mrs. Bird a treasure. To her he now gave Margaret in keeping, to be made comfortable and have everything she liked.

"Of course she shall," responded the good

little woman. "Though where she is to sleep to-night I can't say, as you have not given me no sort of warning, sir ; which you might have done, for Miss hadn't ought to sleep upon a damp bed, as it's salubrious and might injure the institution for life."

"I do not imagine the beds can have contracted much moisture, Bird, during this hot weather," said Dr. Halton. "I wish you had not lighted a fire here," he added, opening the window of the library; "the temperature is very high already."

"Oh, it is better, sir; it keeps up the percolation," said Bird, cheerfully. "And if it is too warm here, you and Missy can have supper in the study."

The room designated as the study in contradistinction to the library, was a smaller one on the ground floor, built out behind the large dining-room, which was now locked up. The study was even more crammed with books and desks than the library, where one table was kept clear by reason of Dr. Halton's having his meals there; and the arm-chairs were all furnished with reading desks, with

lamps swinging round them at every conceivable angle. The window was dirty in consequence of Bird's respect for the papers piled up in order on the sill and on the table before it, and dust had accumulated on the mantelshelf amongst a collection of mineralogical curiosities that lay there in the hallowed security of *tapu*. But that these accumulations of dirt were merely the result of extreme respect for Dr. Theodore's wishes, and not of neglect, was proved by the carefully polished fire-irons and furniture, and the spotlessly brushed carpet. The window looked out into a back garden which the study had half filled up; a superannuated roller, an aucuba bush, and a decayed grass-plot three yards long occupying the remaining space. But May was sick of grass-plots and trees, and she surveyed the grimy walls of this little court with perfect contentment. She was to go out by the front door, and walk where she listed in the great city. She followed the house-keeper up the staircase, where her footsteps sounded ghostly on the uncarpeted boards,—looked into the dressing-rooms, all filled with

swathed up mummies of chairs and tables, and ascended to a small bedroom, where Bird was lighting a fire and unrolling a thick carpet in her desire to make her new protégée comfortable that hot September evening.

"This is Miss Florrie's room, and it's the best for you. It's warm and nice, and the sun shines into it all day," said the good-natured mulatto as she pulled the feather bed down before the fire. May offered to help, and succeeded in getting the window open, on the plea that the draught would feed the fire. She looked round the room, very much puzzled by the diagrams on the wall, and by a small stuffed crocodile that stood on the top of the wardrobe.

"Is this my cousin Florence's room?" she asked doubtfully.

"Yes, bless her! it is; and them's her drawings and her realogical sharks," said Bird, pointing to the maps of the Devonian period that decorated the walls; but May thought she alluded to the small saurian on the wardrobe. It was all one to her. She went down to the study where her uncle was

sitting by the fire, forgetful of the stifling heat in the interest of his book. Mrs. Bird was laying the cloth in the library. Only when she announced that supper was ready, did Dr. Halton rouse up to be conscious of May's presence.

"Has Mr. Edward come in?" he asked, as he took his seat at the table, and unfolded his dinner napkin.

Margaret could not prevent a start at the sound of his name, and was very much comforted when the housekeeper replied,—

"No, sir; he is gone to a party at Mr. John's. He took his latch-key with him, and said I was not to sit up for him," she said, with an audible sniff of discontent. "It's very late he keeps up now o' nights, as you must have remarked, sir."

"Oh well, never mind; so long as he gets home in time to have a sound sleep," said Dr. Theodore, cheerfully. "Margaret, some hot cutlet, my dear? or cold chicken? You look tired, and will be glad to go to bed."

Margaret was indeed glad. She was anxious to avoid seeing Edward, and she hastened

off to bed. She was painfully startled next morning as she was about leaving her room, by hearing his voice, which she perfectly remembered.

"Now then, old Mother Bird, have you no crumbs for any one this morning? Make haste; I must be off."

"Not till you have had your breakfast, Master Edward. It's bad for your suggestive powers, your papa says," replied the little mulatto, running down stairs.

Bird could walk occasionally, and then she walked heavily and with emphasis, as if she carried a hundred-pound weight on her head; but when she ran, she went recklessly, her feet beating a rapid tattoo on the edges of the stairs, that made the listener hold his or her breath in expectation of her breaking her neck ere she reached the bottom. She ran down now, and shut a door violently, producing a loud echo in the uncarpeted house, and then rushed up again to May's door, and asked,—“Will you, Missy, like to have breakfast with Master Edward, or wait till my master comes down.”

"Oh, wait, certainly," replied Margaret, intensely relieved at the possibility of avoiding Edward; and she remained in her room till she heard the hall-door shut, after a great noise of scampering of Bird up and down, and many injunctions on her part to some one else to make no noise to disturb Dr. Halton. When the hall-door closed with a resounding bang, May judged there was no more danger of meeting Edward, and went down to the library to make tea for her uncle.

He came down, his hands full of papers and letters; but he spoke very kindly to her, saying he hoped she would not find herself very lonely in the empty house, and told her where to find the key of the piano and some music books. Margaret assured him she should not be lonely, and wondered to herself if he knew how lonely she had been at Dunstable for so many months. She now only wanted to be alone, for she had letters to write and get posted, of which he must know nothing. Had she understood how kindly Dr. Halton felt towards her, she

would have asked him honestly if he had heard from Jesse or Josiah, and where they were. But she considered him only as one of Jesse's enemies, relentless to him, though disposed to be gentle towards her; and she feared to arouse in him any suspicion of her intention of following Jesse. All she wanted to know of him was, whether or no he meant to trust her with any money, as she considered this the first and greatest step to her escaping from him and England. But this she dared not ask as yet; she must act cautiously, especially if Edward were here, for she feared he would suspect her intention, and see through any excuses she might invent for wanting money. So, determined for the present to ask no questions about Jesse, she, as soon as her uncle left the house, wrote two letters, one to Mrs. Josiah, whom she believed still to be at Sandmouth, and the other to Betty, at Filby, asking if they had news of him. Then she put on her bonnet, and stole out unperceived by Bird, found her way to the nearest post-office, and came back, utterly bewildered by the noise

and confusion which even in the comparatively quiet streets near Murchison Square, appeared tremendous to her, so long solitary in Mrs. Flint's dismal orchard.

"I could not get away now, not if I had the money in my hand," she thought. "I should lose my head before I got down to the river and the docks. I wonder how soon I shall get used to all this confusion!"

The confusion at the river side would have proved ten times greater, but she anticipated nothing worse than Yarmouth, and thought she could soon find her way to some American bound vessel, if she had but the passage money in her hand, and a few hours' security from pursuit. Her extreme ignorance gave her courage. She knew nothing of the dangers that beset her path. She expected to find a small ship with a kindly skipper, and a few honest-hearted sailors, such as those who sailed in Lockwood's coasters, who would take her on board without any questions except as to the payment of her passage. To get the money for this was, therefore, her apparent great

difficulty, and to know where in America to find Jesse.

When she reached Murchison Square again, she hunted among her uncle's books till she found an atlas, and carefully pored over a map of the United States for an hour. Having ascertained that she could learn no more from it, but that it mattered little to what sea-port of the Northern States she went, as there seemed to be railways stretching in all directions between them, she put away the atlas, and began to look about her.

Dr. Halton's house—full of books, and pictures, and mysterious objects, set carefully away upon high shelves and bookcases—would have been a world of excitement to most girls of her age; but she could neither understand nor marvel at what she saw. Neither books nor pictures had any interest for her. Bird interested her; she was so all-important and absolute—and yet so utterly unlike either Green or Mrs. Flint. She followed her into the white-shrouded drawing-room, where the housekeeper showed her her aunt's portrait. Margaret looked at it with

some curiosity, "If she were here, I wonder what she would say to me," she thought; "she is not like Edward."

"And that is Miss Gerty's portrait," added Bird, unveiling another picture, "taken when she was a baby; and a beautiful fenderlogical envelopement it is, her papa says."

May wondered what her pretty baby cousin had grown up into; and delighted the house-keeper by the many questions she asked about her and her aunt. She and Bird passed the day together in great harmony. Bird had got a listener, which was all she desired, and she improved the opportunity; and Margaret, feeling free from all supervision and restraint, was rejoicing in the new sense of liberty. If she might have remained alone with Bird, she would have been happy; but the recollection that she would have to meet Edward, excited her so painfully, that she could interest herself in nothing for more than a few minutes. She listened anxiously for the clock to strike the hour that would bring him; and was half inclined to pretend to have a headache, and go up to her own room,

and not come to dinner ; but she remembered that this excuse could not serve again the next day, and that she must meet him sooner or later. She heard the hall-door opening with the latch-key, and Bird clattering along the hall ; and then her uncle's voice asked where she was ; and she knew she must go down. She summoned up all her resolution, and went down the stairs.

Edward, if she had but known it, was not altogether comfortable in awaiting her. He did not think he had any cause to feel ashamed ; he told himself he had done his very best to save her from the consequences of her own folly, and that she ought to feel grateful to him ; but this, he knew very well, she did not do ; and it was not a pleasant thing to meet and shake hands with a girl, whom he had helped to carry forcibly away from her husband, and who looked on him as her most cruel oppressor. He certainly wished he had not acted quite so energetic a part in removing her from Filby. Mr. John Halton could have done it with a better grace, and would not have felt annoyed by

the recollection of it; but still Edward assured himself he had only acted for the best, and that she would live to thank him for it some day. So he crushed down the whisper of generous shame that he felt, and resolved to meet her as if they were friends, and he had forgotten their first interview. He could not have told his father the incidents of that first interview, and he was glad he did not know them. So as Margaret came in, slowly and reluctantly, Edward rose, came forward, and shook hands, barely letting his eyes rest on her, and immediately turned away to place a chair for her accommodation, and hand her a newspaper. It was, after all, the best thing he could do; and as he took up the *Quarterly* himself, and read it very assiduously, Dr. Halton coming in, was glad to see them both reading comfortably; and opening his own *Spectator*, read in tranquil silence. May held the paper before her face, though not a word did she see. Her thoughts were recalling Edward's cruel words, when he forced her from the little cottage she claimed as her home; and she mentally registered a vow

never to forget nor forgive him for what he then did. She succeeded in hiding her emotion, however; and when Bird looked in, and announced dinner, she rose, and walked into the next room, taking her place opposite her uncle, and asking him, sufficiently composedly, if the day had been very hot in the city.

"The thermometer stood at eighty in the shade," replied Dr. Halton.

Margaret had not the smallest idea what that fact indicated, but, determined to make her uncle continue talking, she asked, "Was it so yesterday?"

"No; only seventy-seven," Dr. Halton answered; "at least, I think so. Did you see, Edward?"

His son was as anxious as Margaret to begin a lively conversation; so he dissented from him, and May soon heard them deep in a discussion of which she understood nothing; but which, to her great relief, did not flag until the meal was over, and they returned to their books. She took up a novel, and it being the first she had

read for some months, she was soon absorbed in it; and almost forgot Edward's unwelcome presence.

Bird brought in three cups of coffee, which she sugared and creamed at her own discretion, without consulting the opinions of those who were to drink them. She then closed the shutters, and the silence was unbroken until the clock struck ten, when May rose and walked to the door. She waited an instant, with her hand on the lock, to see if her uncle looked up.

"Good-night," said Edward, barely turning his head.

And May responded, "Good-night," as she closed the door, and went up-stairs—feeling thankful that the evening was over, and that if she waited upstairs next morning till her uncle's breakfast hour, she need not see her cousin again till dinner. When that time came, she armed herself with several questions to put to her uncle, about some of the incomprehensible drawings and curiosities in the house; and as she only entered the study as the dinner was announced, she found it

less difficult to keep a perfectly unmoved demeanour towards Edward. She read after dinner, and went away early; and Edward felt rejoiced at his own dexterity in avoiding any uncomfortable conversation. In a few days, he forgot the necessity of avoiding a *tête-à-tête*, for one never threatened to occur; and it became a matter of course to see her sitting at the end of the table, or on the sofa, absorbed in a novel, and speaking neither to him nor his father.

Mr. John Halton was annoyed at his brother's interference between him and his niece, and his imprudence in bringing her home. "Why could you not have left her where she was?" he said, angrily. "People will hear of her now. They will see her at your house, and talk of her; and in this very unsatisfactory state of affairs——"

"Why, I call it a very satisfactory state of affairs," said Dr. Theodore, staring uneasily at his brother. "The rascal has taken himself off; and no one, not even his brother, knows when he will be home."

"He will be in New York, probably, by

Christmas," said John Halton; "unless some tempest happily sinks his ship, and rids us of him. He has only gone in a merchant ship to China; and if you could understand reason on such matters, Theodore, I should point out to you that we are worse off now than ever, since, you know, the marriage is legal; and we have let him go without making any provision for her property. He can come back any day now that we have let slip the chance of prosecuting him, and claim all she will have on her coming of age."

"No, he won't; the marriage will be found illegal at last, I am confident," said Dr. Theodore, obstinately.

"He may be drowned—that's my hope," said John. "He was not fated to be hanged, it seems, though he deserved it; so it stands to reason he should be drowned."

"I hope that he may indeed," said Theodore. "Poor girl! we shall never forgive ourselves."

It is probable that if May had lived alone in Murchison Square with her uncle, she would have learned to understand his real interest in her welfare, and have trusted him, and taken

him into her confidence. She might even have succeeded in making him believe that Jesse had some disinterested affection for her, if she had told him how reluctantly he had proposed to take advantage of Josiah's knavery in putting up the banns for her and him, and at all events might have given Dr. Theodore a hope that Jesse would not be ungenerous in the matter of securing some of her money on herself. But Edward's presence froze her into silence. She could not forget his slanders against Jesse, or believe that his father could judge more charitably than he did; and she lived in dread of his finding out her secret purpose of going to America, and therefore she asked no questions about Josiah from her uncle. But she listened attentively when she was unperceived, and learned that Josiah was still in America; that his wife and children were with him, and that he was in the northernmost part of the state of New York, near the town of Martinsburg. This was enough for her, the atlas told her all the rest; and she determined to find out the means of going to New York. She had time and

opportunity to make these inquiries, for her uncle was away all day, and she could go out and wander about by herself. He had taken her to the British Museum, which was near their house, and given her permission to go there whenever she liked, thinking that as he was well-known to the custodians and officers, his niece would be as safe there as in his own house. And, indeed, her quiet, sad, and withal dignified composure of manner made her safe wherever she walked, although her youth and beauty did not fail to be noticed by the passers-by. But May did not spend the hours in the museum. She had looked at the map of London, and found where the river and the docks lay, and while she was supposed to be studying the antiquities of Egypt, she went, dressed in the plain stuff dress in which she had gone to church at Filby, far eastwards, and found her way even to the shipping. Fearing nothing as soon as she found herself among sailors, she walked about, asking questions, and receiving civil or kindly answers, when she told them she was a sailor's wife, and wanted to go to New York to meet her

husband, who was coming there on his return voyage from China. She knew the name of his ship and his captain, and the men saw her story was genuine, and were, or feigned to be, interested in her welfare. Her exceeding ignorance made her more courageous, and she mistook the interest her own youth and helplessness excited, for kindly benevolence, and prepared without any misgivings to start on her long journey with no other protection than that of the title of wife, and the knowledge that Josiah lived two hundred miles inland from the seaport where she would land. She would have gone unhesitatingly in any ship and with any captain who would take her, not even leaving a line behind to tell her uncle where she had gone. She could not see the dangers that surrounded her; she saw all with the bright hope of a child, and she was only withheld from running off by the want of the money wherewith to pay the passage. She waited for this, and waited unrepiningly, consoling herself with the hope that she would not be long delayed, until October was past, and the fast closing in of the days began to bring

her uncle home earlier. Then she heard news that startled her. He was proposing to return to France, and take her with him; and she saw she must lose no time if she ever were to escape, for once in France she would never be able to make the attempt.

One evening, Edward came home earlier than usual, and while they were waiting for dinner, he said,—

“If, sir, you expect to be away all this winter and next spring, as you were last, why should you not let this house to the Evanshaws? It is a really good offer, and worth considering.”

“We must write to your mother about it,” said Dr. Halton. “I do not think she would like it—nor should I myself. I could not put away the books nor the skulls.”

“Oh, I would lock them all up in this room, and they would be safe,” Edward replied; “but the Evanshaws would like to take the house for two years, and that would suit you well.”

May started as she heard this. She was then to be carried to France for two whole years, and the time for departure was close at

hand. The danger made her desperate, and she spoke,—

“Uncle, if we are going abroad, I must buy a great many things. I wish you would let me have some money.”

“The old story, eh?” said her uncle smiling. “‘Let me have some money,’ said by kings to commons and by baby to papa, alike. Well, it is a very reasonable request. How much do you want? Ten pounds?”

“Twenty,” certainly, replied May unhesitatingly. “I must have that at least.”

“Well, I hope you will keep accounts of it,—for your own sake, I mean. I shall not ask to see them, unless you like; but it is a good habit to know what you spend.”

“Yes; I will keep account of it,” said May. But there was a very painful sensation of choking in her throat as she spoke. It was dreadful to have to deceive so kind a guardian. She hated herself for it, as she had done for some time past.

“Edward keeps a strict account of every shilling he spends,” continued Dr. Halton. “I don’t. It’s a bad habit I have, and that is

why I particularly desire my children to form the good habit early. I asked Gertrude to keep a strict account of her expenses, you remember, Edward."

"Yes, sir; I remember," Edward replied, with a smile that did not imply great reliance on Gertrude's exactitude in fulfilling her father's wish.

"I should like thirty pounds, uncle," said May, emboldened by his ready acquiescence in her desires. "I have a great deal to do with it."

"My dear child, it is a large sum to have at once—is it not? Take the twenty first, and then more if you want it," said Dr. Halton.

"Of course if you wish it, I must; but I should so much prefer to have the thirty pounds now," said May. "Oh, do, if you can!"

Her tone of earnest entreaty caused her uncle to look at her in surprise; but he saw trouble in her quivering lips, and his heart was tender.

"You shall have it then, but mind and make a good use of it, child. You shall have it

to-morrow, or to-night if I have as much in the house. Edward, will you fetch my cash-box?"

The money was counted into May's hand. She trembled so much, that her uncle could not have failed to perceive her excitement if the door had not opened, and Bird announced his brother John. May caught sight of him, and darted into the library; Edward assisting her escape by closing the door after her.

"Thirty pounds is not too much for a girl who will have all that money in three years time," said Dr. Halton, looking half deprecatingly towards his son and his brother.

"If you mean Margaret," said John Halton, "I would not trust that girl with any sum of money more than a couple of pounds at a time. She would be at some mischief or other, depend upon it."

"Why what would she do?" asked Edward. "Buy a barrel of gunpowder to blow the house up?"

"Send money out to him in New York, perhaps," said his uncle. "There is no trusting her."

"She cannot. She does not know where he is, any more than we do," said Edward contemptuously.

"Yes; that is the result of following your advice," said his uncle angrily. "He is gone, and we do not know where to find him."

Edward remained silent, and Mr. Halton continued.

"How do you get on with her?"

"She is very good and tractable indeed," said Dr. Theodore; "and we find her a very cheerful companion; don't we, Edward?"

"She seems fond of you, sir," replied his son drily, and he took his book, and left his father and uncle to talk.

May had not lingered in the library, but had gone upstairs to set her ideas in order now that she had the means of escape. She knew that a certain ship was to sail from the river in a few days. It was not an emigrant vessel, but some passengers were going in her, and the mate had responded very kindly to all her questions, and seemed to take a great interest in her. Two of the passengers were women, and to one of them she had spoken

also. But now that the great obstacle, the want of money, was removed, many other difficulties she had hitherto overlooked presented themselves. She felt a fearful dread of the power of the police to ferret her out after she got on board, and her uncle made inquiry after her. She would easily slip away when he was out of the house and join the ship, but he would miss her as soon as he came home, and there was no saying how many hours might not pass before the ship sailed. She remembered how Crosskeys had found her at Filby, and she trembled in fear of his sagacity leading him at once to the ship. She lay awake all night thinking and scheming. Towards morning she dropped asleep, and did not hear Bird's exercise up and down, nor Edward's departure; but she waked at last, and had just completed her toilet, when she heard a cab drive up to the door, in haste, and a loud ring announce some news of importance. She heard Edward hurry to his father's room, and then Bird was called up, and consulted or instructed. It seemed as if some bad news had arrived,

perhaps from Paris she thought, and she left her room, and in the passage met her uncle. He was coming to her, and his face was white. "My poor child!" he faltered; she saw Bird behind him, looking anxiously at her, and a terror shot through her.

"Where is he?" she shrieked; and gathering the answer from their faces, she sank fainting at her uncle's feet, almost before she heard the reply that told her she was alone in the world.

It was the old story. "Sunk in sight of land, with all hands on board."

CHAPTER III.

GONE !

DR. HALTON carried May to her room, and watched anxiously for her return to consciousness, pondering what he should say of consolation. But when she revived, she only asked to see Josiah's letter; she read it herself, and re-read it many times, but paid no attention to him when he spoke. She remained in a kind of stupor, unheeding of all they said around her, her mind only occupied by the one terrible fact that Jesse was gone, and she left. As to when he died or how, she felt no desire to know. She did not bear the agony for many hours; her physical and mental strength had been taxed to its utmost for many months; the stupor gained on her, and soon she lay in a low nervous fever, indifferent to everything but a dull sense of despair, and soon unconscious even of that.

She was tenderly nursed. Aunt Alice came over from Paris, leaving her daughters in a

boarding-school there, and watched her with unremitting care; and gradually she roused to life again, and as the power of thinking returned, she longed to die more and more. The physicians told her aunt she could not recover, and she heard this, and felt for a moment comforted. "I shall go to him; I shall not be long," she thought. And her aunt, coming back into the room, saw a faint flush on her cheeks, and a smile flickering on her lips.

"My darling child, are you better?" she asked, as she bent and kissed her. "Try to get well if you can; we all love you so much, darling."

May wondered why she said so, or what love she could offer her that was worth staying for, if only she could die and go to Jesse. But she said nothing. The hope that she was dying gave her patience to be grateful for kindness; and she took food and medicine to please her aunt, confident that it would be of no use. She repeated to herself the words spoken of her: "She will not recover though she may seem to rally," and

a sense of peace and thankfulness came upon her as she said it.

This sentence of death actually recalled her to life. She was dying fast when it was uttered; but the peace and hope it brought, gave her strong young life power to reassert itself, and while she was waiting for the longed-for summons, she was recovering. But she did not show any sign of this to her anxious nurses; she lay languidly indifferent to all about her, and even the clever physician who watched her, though he saw her strength was coming back, had doubts if she would recover where the will was so manifestly to die. But of a sudden, she was called out of herself, and forced to think of other sorrows than her own. Aunt Alice was taken ill, and in a few hours was declared to be in the extremest danger. May felt the influence of the general excitement, and roused from her languor to share it. Her strength began to return, and in three days after her aunt was taken ill, she rose from her own bed, and, though scarcely able to walk, insisted on going to watch her. At first her uncle would have sent her back,

but the physicians said, "Let her stay;" and she stayed, and became the most useful of the nurses, for a few days after, Bird, running down stairs with more than her usual precipitation, fell, and broke her leg, and the entire charge of Mrs. Halton devolved on Margaret and Dr. Theodore. Practically the responsibility fell on Margaret, though she had every assistance that money could give. Nurses were provided for Bird by the doctors, and other women were called in to help, but the direction of all fell on her; for Dr. Halton, distracted by his anxiety for his wife, could do nothing, and Mrs. John Halton, who came to help, only quarrelled with the nurses and made confusion worse. May, however, never deficient in energy, and now strengthened with that calmness that belongs peculiarly to those who have lost all hope in this life, arranged all things, organized the household, found competent servants, and comforted her uncle. How she did it, she never knew; she lived in a kind of dream in which she could think of all that concerned others, but was able to forget herself as completely as if she was a

prisoner under sentence of death, and was intent only on securing the well-being of those who were to remain behind her, after she should be gone.

At last Aunt Alice was out of danger, and there was time for May to think, and wonder how it happened that she herself was still alive. She ought to have died, and she knew she was to die. She hoped and trusted she was not to live long alone ; but she did not pray for immediate death as she had done during her illness. She felt the solicitude for her aunt that a nurse always feels for a helpless patient, and was anxious to do all she could for her in her suffering. When her aunt should be well, then she should die. The doctor had said she would not recover, and she would have a right to die then. And though May did not actually confess to herself that it should be by her own action, yet she looked forward to the certainty of her death, with a confidence that might be the forerunner of determination.

“As soon as your wife can be moved, she must return to France,” said the physician to Dr. Halton. “She must not stay here

a day longer than you can help ; and if you are wise you will take your niece to see everything in Paris and around it."

"I will let her do anything she likes," said Dr. Halton.

But the other replied, "No, indeed, that will not do. She will want to be quiet, and alone, and that must not be allowed. She must not think of herself, and must be amused. And yet I hardly know how you can do that. You must be careful of her health. I hardly know which is most to be apprehended,—decline or insanity."

"I think there is no danger of either," said Dr. Theodore incredulously. "Neither runs in our family."

"Does suicide?" asked his friend, with a significance that startled Dr. Halton. "You know your niece's character better than I do, but I think you will have trouble with her. And I strongly advise you to thwart her in nothing, and let her find as many new friends and new interests as possible."

As soon as Aunt Alice could leave her room, she started for Paris, accompanied by

Edward, who then returned to help his father to pack up his books and mineralogical specimens that must go abroad. Dr. Halton, seeing that his stay in France would probably be of long continuance, had agreed to let his house to his friend, Mr. Evanshaw, and all the books that were not consigned to the packing-cases had to be stored in cupboards, safe from the sacrilegious eyes of the incoming tenants. Bird also had to be provided for. She was still helpless, and would be a cripple for a long time; and she quarrelled with every nurse who was sent to take care of her; and it took May a week to find a suitable home, and a nurse whose temper could not be ruffled, for the irritable little woman. Edward also had to be provided with a lodging, and his father insisted on transporting a fourth of his library there, to the no small annoyance of his son, and great delay in giving up the house to Mr. Evanshaw. At last, Dr. Halton remembered that he had promised to attend the first winter meeting of a learned society in Paris, and that if he wished to do so, no time was to be lost. Edward told him it was now too

late ; the meeting was to be held in three days from that time, and his preparations were still unfinished.

But May interposed. " You can finish everything here, Edward, and uncle's things can be ready to-morrow if we work hard."

And to his own astonishment, Dr. Halton found himself running up and down all night, and ready to go off to Dover with all his packages by the early morning train.

" What a girl that is, when anything has to be done!" he said to Edward. " She gets through more business than any three people I know."

" She is getting you to cross the water, sir, in very uncomfortable weather," said Edward, listening to the wind. " It must be blowing a tempest in the Channel."

" No matter, so that we can go," said his father. And Margaret and he set off. Dr. Halton was somewhat dismayed as he saw the clouds hurrying past, and found no abatement of the gale as they neared the coast.

" Shall you be afraid to cross, Margaret, if the weather be stormy ?" he asked.

“Afraid! I!” May said, in momentary surprise; but her lips trembled as she saw how utterly unconscious he was of the thoughts that occupied her, and she was glad to hide her face with her veil.

The wind was blowing heavily when they reached Dover. Few passengers presented themselves; and those that did were chiefly American tourists, in too great a hurry to waste a day at Dover, or Indian families hastening to catch the overland mail. Dr. Theodore himself hesitated, but the recollection of the Société Mineralogique prevailed, and he went on board.

The first sight of the harbour, the shipping, and distant sea, destroyed all the self-control May had summoned up to meet it. She walked down to the boat in obedience to her uncle's voice; but, once on board, she heard no more. She stood, looking vacantly at the sailors who were hurrying to and fro, till it seemed as if an iron hand closed over her heart, and a darkness came over everything; and she sank down by the bulwarks, and hid her face in her shawl. Her uncle found

her there, and mistaking her state for the beginning of seasickness, recommended her most anxiously to two or three lady passengers and the stewardess.

“Get her downstairs, and take care of her. We are going to have a dreadful passage,” he said, looking nervously ahead, as the packet’s bows passed the end of the harbour pier. “At this season of the year, the difference of temperature between the northern and southern zones produces a—— Good Lord !” For he felt as if the ship’s back and his own were simultaneously broken over a bar of cast iron, as the first heavy roller passed under the keel, and the steamer settled down, with her bows apparently going under the white avalanche advancing to meet her. Then she rose up again, rolling to the other side as she did so, and Dr. Theodore felt all his strength to stand and his scientific theories go together.

It was one of the heaviest seas that Her Majesty’s packet had ever had to struggle against. The captain debated with himself whether he should hold on his course, or put back ; but the difficulty in making Dover

harbour made him still keep the boat's head to seaward. The passengers all disappeared from the deck, or were led away helpless, and stowed safely in corners.

May, too well inured to the motion of a vessel to mind the pitching, sat still, hearing the wind and feeling the spray which was flying over, but seeing nothing but what had passed two years before on the Sandmouth coast, when she and Jesse had waited together for death. She heard his voice again whispering in her ear ; she felt again his arm round her, and again seemed to wake up on the shingly beach to find him kneeling beside her. All that followed passed in a long vision before her : the night in the lugger, their marriage, and their happy cottage home ; till all ended in a roar of tempest where the strength of the bravest was of no avail, and she saw his ship go down amidst the foaming waters. She roused herself as a wave burst over the bulwark, and deluged the deck at her feet ; she shook the wet from her cloak, and looked over the side at the sea, gazing into the deep green hollow that yawned beneath the packet, looking

down, trying to see, through its depths, what lay under it, if that pale sweet face was there, reproaching her silently for lingering so long in the world away from him whom she had promised to follow to the death. She thought if she only knew he was there, lying where one spring, when the vessel lurched over, would take her without chance of hindrance, she would have seized the moment, and lingered no longer. But he lay far away in the unfathomable waters of the ocean ; she would not find him here. This thought seemed to draw her back. She hesitated to make the spring, or rather she lacked the energy for it ; she waited for a deeper lurch to send her over,—waited as a traveller dying in the desert waits for death, trusting it was at hand, but unable to seek it by any effort. Still she was leaning over the side of the ship, and had relinquished her hold of the rope by her, gazing down into the dark caverns over which the boat was striding ; she leaned over more and yet more, till a man put his arm round her, and forcibly pulled her back, and placed her in safety.

"You were a'most gone, missus," he said roughly, "if I hadn't a' caught you. Faint are you? You'd best go below," and he led her to the door of the companion way.

Almost gone! Then why had she been brought back? Another moment, and she would have been with Jesse; and he had drawn her back into the sad and lonely life of this world, with all its dreariness. She turned away from the man who had saved her; she could not thank him; all she could do was to restrain her impulse to tell him he was cruel to her; and she burst into tears, as he left her at the top of the stairs, and those tears the honest-hearted seaman took for thanks.

At the bottom of the stairs was a host of passengers, in whom excitement, or the excessive pitching of the vessel, had overcome seasickness. In the midst was Dr. Theodore, hardly able to speak, trying very ineffectually to comfort the terrors of an Italian lady, who implored him in broken English to go to the captain to ask if they were in danger.

"I would go, but indeed it is impossible

for me to keep my equilibrium on deck," he said piteously. "It is impossible for me to ascend these stairs, even though I am in great anxiety for the security of my niece, who is up there; but I assure you the danger cannot be imminent. *Il pericolo non è imminente.*"

"Danger" was the first word Margaret heard, though she had been standing there two or three minutes; but it roused her as an appeal to herself.

"There is no danger at all," she called out in a clear, ringing voice that was heard by them all. "The captain is here; shall I ask him?"

"Oh, do if you can, oh do!" said another voice in English. "I daresay I am very foolish, but I am so frightened."

And Margaret went to the captain, and claimed his attention.

"There is a lady in the cabin who is very frightened, and wishes to know if there is any danger."

"H'm," said the captain, looking at her with evident interest. "Well, my dear young

lady, you have been at sea often enough, I think, to know that a new ship, with her engines in good order, can't be in much danger between Dover and Calais, even in a sea like this, unless something unforeseen happens. I shan't be sorry to see you all safe in Calais—fact; but you can tell the lady we are all right."

And with a nod and a grim smile, he turned away, and hurried to look down into the engine-room.

Margaret went down into the cabin, and did her best to comfort the ladies there, though two were old travellers, and bore up bravely. But the Italian woman and her daughter needed every consolation, and the young Englishwoman, who had so deprecated her own cowardice, was terrified almost beyond argument or comfort. Her husband was somewhere on deck, overpowered with seasickness and a great deal of brandy, and she was convinced he would be washed overboard. Margaret, who alone of all in the cabin could walk steadily, volunteered to go and find him, and returned to report that he

was asleep under a bench, and thereby succeeded in calming the poor lady's fears, so that she was moderately recovered before they reached Calais. Then the Englishman under the bench was roused from his lethargy, and induced to take charge of his luggage and his wife. Then an Italian gentleman, his face green with seasickness, emerged from the gentlemen's cabin, and called Heaven to witness he would never cross the sea again to visit England. Nothing, he told Dr. Halton, while courteously thanking him for his kind attention to his wife and daughter, —nothing would have induced him to cross that day when heard the wind rise, but that he was a member of "*la Société Minéralogique*" in Paris, and must attend its anniversary meeting. Dr. Halton, who, on hearing this, felt like a freemason meeting a brother mason amidst Philistines and unbelievers, proposed that they should travel in company, which they forthwith did; and Margaret, who would gladly have been silent during the long railway journey, was obliged to talk to the Italian ladies. The daughter

was a year younger than herself, and going to Paris to meet her intended husband, as the mother told May—descanting much on the beauties of her daughter's future home at Naples. She talked of this rather more than was necessary, May thought, if the object was to please her daughter; but she soon guessed the reason of the good lady's vivid picturing, for when tired with talking, she took first forty winks, and then a comfortable doze, the girl drew a deep breath and sighed,—

“Oh, I will not like the *palazzo*,” she said, in her broken English. “I will be so very *triste* there.”

“Not with him—not with your husband!” May replied, feeling she must say something.

But the girl shook her head and replied,—
“Yes, I will.” And after a pause, during which she played with a bracelet, which the mother had said was a gift from her betrothed, she asked,—

“In England one marries all for love, is it not? I have read in your books.”

“Do not you love the Marquis?” May

asked astonished. But her listener looked at her with an air of surprise and incredulity, and then replied,—

“I have seen him one time only!” And then she began to cry, but checked herself quickly, and observed that her mother had assured her that the Marchese was very good and amiable, and had promised to be very indulgent.

Margaret listened in amazement and sadness; but it was impossible for her not to feel the keenest sympathy with Giulietta, and the Italian girl responded to that sympathy. They talked unceasingly together till they reached Paris, and separated with the promise on either side to be friends for ever.

Dr. Halton had not had time to announce his coming to his family, so that his entrance took them by surprise. Mrs. Halton was dozing on the sofa, and Florence was so absorbed in a book as to be unaware of his entrance, till after Gertrude had thrown her arms round his neck, and roused them both by her exclamations of joy. Between their delight

and his anxiety to know how his wife's health was, Margaret was overlooked for a few moments, and she had time to look at her cousins, and decide that Florence must be her friend because Gertrude was like Edward. When her presence was at last recognised, she received a most cordial welcome. The greeting of the two girls was hardly less affectionate than their mother's. For a short time May tried to look grateful; but when they began to ask questions about her early home, she pleaded fatigue, and her aunt rose, and offered to take her to her room for the night. Gertrude would have accompanied her, but her father called her back, rather uncertain what to say, or how to warn her from pestering May with questions which he dreaded she should answer, and yet aware he must stop Gertrude's curiosity at once.

"No, Gerty; don't run away from me in such a hurry. Margaret prefers to be alone with your mother, and I want to give you a piece of advice. You and Florence want to make your cousin really happy, don't you? You wrote me so."

“ Yes, papa ; you know we do,” said Florence.

“ Well, then, I want you to promise me you will mind what I say. You must never ask her any questions,—any questions at all, mind,—about herself, or her home, or her friends. She has——”

He stopped for a moment, disconcerted by the wondering amazement of his girls, and doubting whether he had done well in saying so much ; but after a moment’s reflection, he saw he must trust them thus far.

“ She was left among servants and uneducated people, and not good people, and I am glad to say she has promised never to speak to you about them ; and so you must be careful not to ask any questions, but help her to forget them. And one thing more,” he added, as compassion for Margaret suddenly stirred his heart : “ one of her friends has just been drowned in a shipwreck, and she is very sad ; so you must not talk of shipwrecks or storms to her, do you understand ?”

“ Oh, no, papa ! You may trust us ; we won’t

say a word," Gertrude replied. "Oh how she must have thought of it in coming over to-day! When did it happen?"

"She heard of it just before your mother came to England; but I do not want to talk to you about it, my dear girl. I want to forget it all myself, and help her to forget it; and I have brought her here that you may drive it out of her head. You must make her interested in other things if you can."

"Yes, papa; we will try indeed if we can," said Gertrude. "What would she be most likely to care for?"

"No one thing more than another. She is very ignorant, and you will find it difficult to make her care for your books and music. You must make her love you; that is the best thing for her now; and by-and-by she will like the things you do."

"Oh, papa, will you take me to the meeting of the Société, when you go?" said Florence.

"You? Who told you I would take you? They won't let little girls go in," said her father, smiling at this evidence of her interest in his

own hobby ; and Florence, thereby encouraged, replied,—

“Oh, yes ; but if you, papa, ask very much, they will let me in, I know. Professor Stein was here yesterday to ask if you were coming, and I asked him, and he did not say no.”

“Is Margaret going to live with us always ?” asked Gertrude.

“Not always ; but at least for the next three years. Then she will have a house of her own if she likes. It will depend on circumstances ; but we must try to make her happy if we can.”

CHAPTER IV.

NEW SCENES.

IT was a hard task that Dr. Halton had undertaken, to change the current of his niece's thoughts, and obliterate the past from her own memory as well as his. He was ready to offer her every amusement and object of interest that could be devised, but there was in her at present no capacity for being interested or amused. She was unable to appreciate the intellectual pleasures he provided for his own girls, and too unhappy to be pleased with the more childish delights of theatres and picnics. She learned the lessons set her,—sometimes diligently, at others listlessly; but whether she worked or idled, she was equally indifferent to the subject before her. Gertrude and Florence kindly tried to put themselves in sympathy with her, affected to care for her progress in their studies, marvelling all the time at her inexplicable ignorance, but never expressing their wonder

aloud, or asking any questions about her previous idleness, though to their father they complained of it.

“Why, she must have been brought up among savages, I think, to be so ignorant, so utterly stupid,” said Gertrude. To which Dr. Halton replied—

“She had an unkind governess, who made her dislike learning. You, Florence, go back, and read through your easier lessons with her, and help her on.”

Florence obeyed, but it was of no use; Margaret remained idle and listless, indifferent to all that went on round her, and growing paler and thinner week by week, till even Gertrude saw the change, and her uncle was seriously alarmed. Life was a dreary round to the poor girl, whose whole thoughts were fixed on the past, and who could see no hope of future happiness—nor wished to do so. To have been happy, if she could have been so, would have seemed treachery to her lost love; but no gleam of happiness ever came near her. She thought of her life as it was in her childhood at Sandmouth, and of what

it should have been in her own house at Rawlstone, with her love near her to make all things bright and precious in her eyes. When she remembered how cheerful his presence and love had made even the wretched cottage at Filby appear, she could not help drawing pictures of what her felicity would have been, had he been allowed to accompany her to Rawlstone, to share the riches that would have been hers.

With her mind filled with these sad reflections, it was impossible she should have any companionship with Gertrude. She would have received sympathy from her aunt willingly, had she been able to understand that Jesse was to be loved and mourned; but Mrs. Halton had betrayed too openly her belief that he was a villain, and his death a happy riddance, for Margaret ever to speak to her on the subject again. But she had two friends to whom, though she never confided her story, she felt drawn in strong sympathy, and in whose companionship she found something of the strengthening consolation and comfort that friendship gives under affliction.

One of these was the Italian girl, Giulietta, now married to the amiable Marquis, who had maintained his title of the most indulgent of husbands, by consenting to remain in Paris for a time, instead of taking his bride to his odious palazzo at Naples. Giulietta was half-afraid of her husband, half-proud of him, and confided all her doubts and fears to the sympathising ear of Margaret, who found her a far more congenial friend than her cousin. But she was also called upon for sympathy by another woman, older than herself, and almost as unhappy. She had also been one of the passengers on the Dover packet, being the lady who had been frightened, and whom she had comforted during the storm, while her husband and natural protector lay on the deck, stupified with the brandy he had taken to keep off seasickness. This was not the first time, nor the last that Mr. Hathaway was stupid with brandy, but without having so good an excuse; and his young wife was often very unhappy, and Margaret found her crying bitterly.

Aunt Alice fell ill again, and May, roused

from her listless indifference, became again her devoted nurse, watching day and night by her bedside, and making her cousins recognise with surprise that their stupid, indolent classmate was a woman grown, compared to themselves, in time of anxiety and tribulation. Mrs. Halton was not long in danger, but she required constant nursing; Dr. Theodore took care that Margaret was not allowed to overtask her physical powers in this work, but he saw that the excitement of watching the invalid was good for her, and did not oppose her constituting herself head-nurse. The physicians and other nurses recognised her capacity for this duty, and admitted she had a natural authority in the sick-room; and her uncle recognised it too, and when broken down with anxiety and despair, he turned from his own weeping and frightened girls, as finding in the sight of their distress only an additional pang, he came to Margaret for consolation, listened to her quiet assurances that there was still room for hope, and went away comforted.

Aunt Alice recovered, and needed no more nursing, but Margaret's mental activity

had been awakened, and now turned to fresh objects of interest. She began to listen to the scientific discussions that took place twice a week in her uncle's drawing-room; she began to read, and soon applied herself to study.

"I thought it would come in time," Dr. Halton thought. "And now she is fairly started, I expect she will make up for lost time with railroad speed."

But as soon as his niece began to work, Dr. Halton found he had to contend with a daring spirit of revolutionary independence which manifested itself in all manner of whims and intellectual caprices. She had formed her own opinion upon everything, and insisted on carrying it out defiantly, in the teeth of all instructors of youth and theories of education. Her singing-master praised her diligence; but the pianoforte and she came to an open battle.

"It is sheer waste of time my spending three hours every day playing over scales and exercises, and therefore I won't do it. Monsieur Schmidt says that however much I work, I shall never play well, from having begun too late. So, why should I try?"

"The knowledge of music will give you great pleasure when you grow older," said Mrs. Halton.

"Well then, Auntie, I can hire a good musician to play to me, not torture other people's ears by playing badly myself. I like music somewhat, and I daresay can learn to like it more, as my uncle does, though he cannot play a note. He has as much enjoyment in it as Gertrude or you have, and so will I; but I shall not waste my time acquiring '*la dextérité manuelle*,' as Monsieur Schmidt calls it. I want to give the time to books and to lectures."

This last argument prevailed with Dr. Halton, and the music-master was dismissed. In the same determined spirit of resistance, Margaret met the dancing-mistress.

"She may teach me to walk gracefully if she can, but I shall never dance; and it will be only wasting time to take lessons. I never will go into a ball-room,—that I know."

And in the same way, she opposed the idea of learning drawing, as a useless attempt to acquire a mere smattering of a great art that

could be admired in reverence without any such study. But here, Giulietta's husband, the Marchese Lancia, came to Aunt Alice's aid, and proved that a certain degree of training of eye, if not of hand, was necessary for a due appreciation of the art and the power to reverence it. His arguments carried the day, and Margaret consented to apply herself to her pencil, and worked with a steadiness that surprised them all.

"It is the fault of circumstances only, that she is not a clever woman," said Dr. Theodore; "but I fear too much time has been lost. I consider John's conduct in leaving her at Sandmouth, has been almost criminal."

As Margaret grew more cheerful, and began to share the amusements of her cousins with somewhat of the zest proper to her age, Dr. Halton often wondered whether she were forgetting Jesse, or whether she happily recognised that it had not been an altogether cruel fate that sundered them; but he asked no questions, knowing he should at once make mischief, and a hopeless estrangement between her and himself, by doing so. She talked, and

laughed, and made plans for her future home at Rawlstone, and seemed to be reconciled to her life; but he had a suspicion that, deep under this apparent contentment, there was an intense sorrow, driven down by the gay impressions of the hour, as the arctic frost is driven down into the ground by the summer sunshine, only to lie there unseen and eternally.

He was right in his fear. She never overgot that sharp agony; it left its own imprint on every part of her character, giving an unusual firmness and energy to her impulsive and excitable temperament. She had assumed the responsibilities of womanhood, while her cousins were playing with children's toys. She had challenged the sorrows of life to come round her when she chose her husband without asking advice or help from her guardian, and sorrow had come on her, and changed her to a sad and weary woman while Gertrude was a comparative baby. Dr. Halton felt this, and when she asserted her own opinion, or challenged his wishes, gave way, as he would have done to one ten years older. Her aunt felt it, and when she was ill and weak, resigned herself

into her guardianship without a doubt ; and Clara Hathaway recognised it too, and poured out all her grief to her as if she had been an elder sister.

“ Oh, it is hard, Margaret ! It is hard to love him so dearly as I do, and know that no one respects him,—that they call him a drunkard, and say he will never be better. And he was so good, and so clever,—and such a little time ago, too,—before this came upon him.”

“ Who taught him to drink ?” May asked, by way of showing sympathy, for she could think of nothing to say in consolation.

“ Oh, it came on him little by little. He used to sit with his friends over the wine, and be the most cheerful and brilliant of them all. I never thought there could be any harm in it. And now what will become of him ! Oh, Margaret, pity me, pity me !”

Margaret was ready enough with her pity. She could recall the one or two occasions when she had thought Jesse had drunk more than his head would bear. She had taken the matter very philosophically then, because he had only been somewhat uproarious, and was perfectly

good-humoured. But as Mrs. Hathaway described how her husband had gradually grown from bad to worse, the scene of Jesse's intoxication,—for intoxicated he certainly had been one night,—rose very vividly before her; and her sympathy for her friend was all the more true, because she wondered whether, had he lived, he would ever have become like John Hathaway.

* * * * *

When the winter came, Dr. Halton took his family to Nice. Dr. Theodore had never found travelling so easy before. He had a habit of losing his luggage, of getting lost himself while exploring mountain passes, and, being gentle and conscientious, was bullied and imposed upon in every direction. But Margaret arranged the order of march, looked after the impedimenta, found proper guides for him, conquered all difficulties, overawed or soothed tiresome innkeepers and irate officials, till all went smoothly as a festival.

“The girl is a miracle,” Dr. Halton wrote to his brother. “She makes every one obey her. No one would believe that under

such a gentle exterior there was hidden so much energy."

"Well, she gave pretty practical proof of it, I think, two years ago," said John Halton, as he read this letter to his nephew, who now lived in his house. "Theodore never would believe what a headstrong girl she was. However, it may be a fortunate thing that she has this turn for managing, since she will have Rawlstone to look after, unless she marries before then. She may do that, as that scoundrel is so providentially drowned,—yes, she may. I should advise you to go and look after her, Edward."

"She is hardly likely," said Edward, mending his pen with great indifference. "And I should pity the man who married her."

Whether John Halton meant that his nephew should look after Margaret to prevent her making a second unwise match, or with a view to taking her himself, was not evident. If he meant the latter, Edward scouted the idea indignantly. He had quite given up any idea of keeping the Cressingham property in the family by marrying his cousin. He looked on

her as disgraced, and therefore no possible wife for him; and as to her beauty, she was too much like his own sister to realize his notions of loveliness. He felt he never could care for her; he never had; he had foolishly once thought he did, but it was a mistake.

It really was a mistake; in that he was right. He had grown up to think it probable he would marry her; he could not well avoid doing so, when he so often heard his father and uncle say confidentially, that the match would be sure to come off; and the idea had become a conclusion with him by the time he was twenty-two, just as she threw herself away upon Jesse Freeman. There was no romance in Edward at that time. Romance is a flower that blows very late in those plants that are hard and woody, and strike their roots deep, though it comes none the less surely, and with finer blossom in such, than in the little precocious seedlings that come into bloom while infants, and are withered and bare all their lives afterwards. But at twenty-two, he was as free from romance as his uncle's ledger; he looked at the thing philoso-

phically, saw his rich cousin was lost to him, and all that remained to be done was to save such of her money for herself as could be managed. This he had tried to do, and failed, and only hoped he might not have to acknowledge Jesse Freeman as his relation. The news of his death had in no way affected his feelings towards Margaret, and he was perfectly indifferent what she did with herself or her money.

When the Haltons returned to Paris in the ensuing summer, Edward went over to visit them, but saw little of his cousin. She had resolved to avoid him as much as possible, and went every day to visit Giulietta. The Marchese Lancia, with quick Italian wit, divined her reason for coming, and told his young wife's mother to ask her, and press her, to stay with them altogether for a time; and so she kept out of Edward's way, which was a satisfaction to him as well as to herself.

Edward tried to persuade his parents to return to England for a couple of months during the summer; but they were so happy in their French home that he could not pre-

vail; and Dr. Halton let the house in London to Mr. Evanshaw, for another nine months,—reserving to himself the power of turning him out of it early in the following spring, when he should come back from Nice or Mentone.

But when Edward's influence was withdrawn from the family councils, it became very doubtful if even this next year would see Dr. Halton in England. He went early in the autumn to Nice, and settled there; and to Margaret's great delight, the Marchese Lancia and his wife followed them, and stayed there all the winter. Dr. Theodore liked the Marchese, who was sufficiently interested in science to be a sympathetic companion; and he listened complacently to his suggestions that when the spring came, he should, instead of returning to London, push on into Italy, and taking his palazzo near Naples for a centre of operations, investigate the geologic and volcanic systems of the surrounding country.

The Hathaways left Paris while Margaret was at Nice, and she lost all trace of them.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASTORIA.

AMONG the arbutus-trees that then covered the hill-side near the town of Nice, there stood a long, low house, coloured light-blue, in a garden enclosed by a low mortar wall, over which the aloes drooped their long leaves, and on which the green lizards skurried up and down in the warm spring sunshine. A narrow road ran between this wall and another like it, high enough completely to shut out the orchards and olive grounds behind it from pedestrians; and the two walls being exactly alike, and continuing unbroken for two miles, formed a very monotonous and unsatisfactory prospect for young Robert Evan-shaw, who, on one of these hot spring days, was walking along the white road, anathematizing the dust and the heat, and occasionally trying to find a footing in the wall, by which to climb up and have a peep over the limits of his prison path. He likewise

anathematized the innkeeper, who had allowed him to attempt the journey on foot, and in the same breath Dr. Theodore, whom he was going to visit.

“What the deuce does the old gentleman mean by hiding himself at the end of this infernal lane, like a fox in his burrow?” he muttered, as he rose from the ground, where he had been sitting to rest himself and catch the lizards—or rather their tails—which remained in his fingers, while the unfortunate little wretches ran away to hide their diminished lengths in the cracks of the mortar. “And why did Edward Halton say his father lived just out of the town, and so induce me to walk it,—for me to reach the house half dead, and a foot deep in dust?”

As he spoke, he came in sight of the great wooden gate, giving access to the blue house, and he surveyed his dust-powdered boots with great disgust. Before he could devise any means for improving their appearance, voices were heard, and two ladies appeared—apparently walking on the top of the wall, which was, in fact, at this place, but the front

of a broad terrace, running along the garden. Mr. Evanshaw, seeing that there was no retreat, "boldly rang the bell;" and was admitted by a Swiss servant, who welcomed him in a polyglot speech of French, Italian, and Nizzard dialect, which it would have puzzled the whole Philological Society to have determined the roots of. François understood all civilised tongues, however, in a certain qualified degree; so that Mr. Evanshaw, after explaining, to his listener's great disappointment, that he was not Mr. Edward Halton, but only his friend, was soon divested of dust, and ushered into the presence of Dr. Halton, who, with one pair of spectacles on his eyes, and the other in his hand, wherewith to mark and accent his periods, was dictating a letter to Florence, who had already written half a dozen.

"The striking resemblance between this cranium, and those of undoubted African type,—my love, how are we to get the skull conveyed safely and quickly to England? I cannot tell."

Here François opened the door, and an-

nounced,—“Shentlemans Inglese, monsieur : Meester Evanshaw, voici.”

Dr. Halton received the new comer hospitably, and asked if he were on his way home to England. Being answered in the negative, his countenance fell.

“I am sorry you are not. Do you know of any one who is going back, who would take charge of a valuable skull?”

“A valuable skull?” said young Evanshaw, looking very much adrift.

“It has been found here, and presents characteristics widely different from those of any race supposed to have ever inhabited this country. I desire greatly to know what Huxley will say to it; do you, sir, know a brachiocephalic cranium when you see it?”

“It is a bird, is it not?” asked the unlucky ignoramus, making a rude guess at the Doctor’s meaning. Florence opened her dark blue eyes wide, in amazement and some indignation, as she supposed he was mocking her father; but before anything more could be said, François again put in his head, and observed,—

"Inglese shentleman ozer : Meester Edward Halton from London."

Both Dr. Theodore and his daughter jumped up, and hurried from the room : Florence without a word of apology to the guest, and her father with only an incoherent explanation. But Mr. Evanshaw was left disconsolate only a minute ; for, by the open window, there came in, to cheer his solitude, three ladies, two English and one Italian.

Giulietta Lancia was at this time one of the most beautiful women in Italy ; but Mr. Evanshaw, far from recognising her supreme loveliness, unhesitatingly, like a true Briton, bestowed all his admiration on his own fair-haired country-women, and did not give a second look at the Marchesa. He hastened to introduce himself as the son of the gentleman who rented the house in Murchison Square, and the friend of Edward Halton ; and was received as such very graciously by Gertrude.

"We are expecting my brother every day," she said. "Have you any idea when he would leave England?"

Mr. Evanshaw inwardly hoped that when

he stated the fact of Edward's being then in the house, he should not have the mortification of seeing his hearers run away from him, as Florence and Dr. Halton had done. He therefore began cautiously—relating the fact of his having travelled from London with Edward, before coming to the announcement that he was now arrived—"Your brother complains that it is very awkward for Dr. Halton to be so long away from business, as he is still a partner."

"Of course it is very awkward; and we ought to go home," said Gertrude. "I do so wish papa would go back."

But the Marchesa, who understood English perfectly, exclaimed in her own soft Italian, that Gertrude was very cruel to try and dissuade her father from making the proposed visit to Naples.

"What shall I do without you all, at my large house at Ponte Rotto? And my husband—he counts upon your coming there to keep us alive. You must remember your promises to us. You, Margherita dear, you will keep yours at least."

But Margaret shook her head. "No; I want to go home," she answered. And Robert Evanshaw suggested that the summer was coming, and it would be too hot to enjoy a journey to Naples.

"But you would not stay at Naples," remonstrated Giulietta. "You would be at Ponte Rotto; and it is cool there."

But Margaret shook her head again, and laughed.

"Then we will go to our villa at Santa Maria, by the sea. It is not hot there; the garden is full of trees, and oranges, and citrons; and your eyes will not be tired by the sun, and the fountains play all day, and it is close to the sea, and the fishing boats lie on the sand beneath the windows, and the water is so blue and so tranquil,—not like your sea, Margherita dear."

"No; my sea is rough," said Margaret, "and stormy; and the oak-trees are all bent and broken by the wind from the north-east; and the high waves wash away pieces of the rocks every winter, and great ships are wrecked in sight of the house."

"And you want to go back to such a place, Margherita? But it is an inferno! No, you will come to us," persisted Giulietta, taking her hand in hers, and carrying it to her lips. "Why do you want to go to such a home?"

"I was born there, and I love it, and I want to see it all again," said Margaret. "I will come to you in a year or two: I promise you that."

While they were speaking, Gertrude was entertaining Mr. Evanshaw; her sense of politeness not having permitted her to run away when she heard Edward had come. She was not kept long in impatience however; for Edward came in with Dr. Halton, who hastened to show him his new treasure.

"Look what I have to show you, Edward," he said, hardly allowing him time to receive Gertrude's kiss, and hold out his hand to Margaret. "Look at this, found in the breccia, deep buried; and it has not a single characteristic of the dolichocephalic skull, has it?"

"Was it buried in a tomb, or in the

ground?" asked Edward, turning to look at the treasure, with his arm still round his sister's waist.

"Deep buried in breccia—very deep; and this flint-headed arrow near it. And it has the brachiocephalic characteristics very strikingly developed to my mind."

"Yes; very," replied Edward, looking however at Margaret.

"What do you conjecture?" asked his father, eagerly.

"Who is that Italian lady?" Edward whispered to Gertrude.

"Might it be a Guanche?" said Dr. Halton. "I have a doubt, though, on that head."

"It is the Marchesa Lancia," said Gertrude, in an undertone. "I will introduce you."

And as Margaret went to look at the skull, and answered Dr. Halton's observations with some appearance of interest, Gertrude was able to present her brother to their Italian friend.

"We ought to ascertain precisely the depth at which it was found," suggested Margaret.

"We have not examined the spot thoroughly, I think."

"Perhaps not, my dear. Well, let us go again, and judge for ourselves. Order the carriage."

The Marchesa sent for her carriage as well; but the exploring party was not so large as Dr. Halton would have liked. Florence and Edward accompanied him, and the Marchesa also; but Gertrude persuaded her mother and Margaret to take a short and quiet drive, to show Mr. Evanshaw the town, and they returned early to saunter about the garden. Mrs. Halton went into the house, and May joined Gertrude and Mr. Evanshaw, who seemed to have plenty to talk about.

"What a strange thing it seems for a young lady like your sister to be interested in bones and skulls!" Mr. Evanshaw ventured to say. "Generally a lady has a horror of such subjects."

"Yes; but Florence takes an interest in everything papa likes. She is his secretary, and writes all his letters," Gertrude replied. "And as for shrinking from the sight of a

skull, no one who has lived in our house could well do that. Have not you got used to them in all this time that you have lived in Murchison Square?"

"They are all locked up in cupboards, out of sight," said Margaret. "I dare say Mr. Evanshaw does not suspect their existence."

"No, indeed. You do not mean that in the house we now occupy there is a collection of such things, Miss Cressingham," said Mr. Evanshaw, with ill-concealed disgust.

"In the cupboard on the staircase, there are thirteen, all nicely labelled. I put them there myself, when we left the house," said Margaret mischievously; "and as to what is in the library, I forbear to say more, in pity to your feelings."

"We have all got well used to such things," said Gertrude, intensely amused by Mr. Evanshaw's look of genuine horror. "I remember Edward telling me that one beautiful moonlight night a skull lying under his bed began to move——"

"Miss Halton!"

"Yes; began to move. Perhaps a mouse

had got into it; but it was never explained. But it began to move, and rolled slowly over the floor under the bed, till it rolled out across the room into the streak of moonlight, and there it lay all night, grinning at him."

Robert Evanshaw could not repress a slight shudder; but, mastering his dislike of the subject, said,—

"Well, I always thought I myself could tell the most dreadful stories that anybody knew, but this is worse than all my ghost stories."

"Do you believe in ghosts?" asked Gertrude, trying to look grave.

"Well, I don't exactly; but sometimes one knows of queer things that make one think it is just possible people may have some foundation for their beliefs. Well, I will just tell you of what I know, and you can judge. When I was in America two years ago, I met an old lady who had a son, or rather had had a son, for she was in mourning for him. When he was at sea, she had a terrible dream about him: she saw him murdered and thrown overboard by his sailors; and three weeks later she heard that his vessel,

the *Astoria*, was wrecked, and every one on board drowned."

"Well, then, the dream was all wrong," Gertrude observed.

Margaret had become attentive as soon as the *Astoria* was mentioned.

"Yes; the dream appeared to be wrong; but I remember Mrs. Sumner telling me how she had dreamed it, and she was then in black, and said Captain Sumner was drowned in the wreck. But she said she felt sure that Captain Sumner was not on board the *Astoria* at the time it foundered, because of her dream about him. We all thought her very absurd; but since then, quite a year afterwards, came a letter saying it was all true: Captain Sumner had been murdered at sea by his own men before the ship was wrecked."

"The *Astoria* of Newport?" gasped May, clutching Mr. Evanshaw's arm.

He turned to her in astonishment, and was half a minute before he replied,—

"Yes, of Newport; I think they said Captain Sumner lived at Newport. The crew rose on him; they thought there was gold on

board; and they murdered him and two or three men who were faithful to him, and then came home, and scuttled the ship almost in sight of land."

"Eh! Margaret! what is the matter?" cried Gertrude, as she caught sight of her cousin's face, and saw her almost convulsed with agitation. "Oh! what is it? Oh, Mr. Evanshaw, what is it?"

But May had sufficient self-control left to dart past them, and run to the house. Gertrude followed her up to her room, and was frightened to see her agitation, for she remembered her father had forbidden her to speak of shipwreck to her.

"Oh, Margaret, speak to me!" she said piteously. "Speak, dear; oh do, just a word!" But May, white and tearless, motioned her away, and covered her face with her hands, while Gertrude saw she shivered with terror. It was a relief to her to hear her father's voice in the hall, and she flew down to him for help.

"Oh, papa, come to me. Margaret is ill. Florrie, go to Mr. Evanshaw on the terrace,

and tell him about the excavations ; but, papa, you come. He has been telling a shipwreck story, and I fear it is the ship her friends were in ; for she is ill, and,—oh I must go to her.”

“ No, no, dear ; I’ll go,” said her father, hurriedly. “ What did she say ? What did he say about the ship ? ”

“ Oh, it was a dreadful story ! The sailors turned pirates, and murdered the captain and some of his men, and sank the ship ; and Margaret has not spoken since she heard it. Oh dear ! ”

“ I will go to her, and you go to your mother, and say nothing of it to her,—mind that, Gerty, I cannot have her worried by Margaret, and if I call, you must come. But Margaret will get over it quickly : she knew he was dead,—and it makes no difference whether he was murdered or drowned,” he added to himself ; but he changed his opinion when he found his niece lying on the sofa, with her face hidden among the pillows, and moaning and shivering as if in bodily pain.

“ My poor child, this has been a dreadful

shock," he said tenderly ; "but it is the same thing, you know, as if the ship had sunk in a storm. Good Lord!" he involuntarily exclaimed, "I suppose he was killed too. He could not be one of the murderers."

"Oh, he is dead. He would stand by his captain," said Margaret, raising her face, livid with horror. "He would stand by him, and he is murdered,—murdered. Oh Jesse, Jesse!"

She hid her face again, as a vision of Jesse, wounded and bleeding, struggling with his murderers, rose before her. She had learned to think of him dying resignedly when his ship sank in the tempest, his last thought being of her ; but it was a new agony to image him hunted, worried to death by ruffians thirsting for his blood, throttled, dragged down, trampled in the contest, disfigured, and his dead body insulted and flung overboard, as that of a dog, by those who had butchered him.

Time and other interests had soothed and deadened her grief for him, but the picture of him dying this horrible death tore her heart-strings again as if he had not really died till now.

But her uncle stood silent, horrified by another idea.

"God grant he was one of the killed, and not one of the murderers!" he murmured. "Good Lord! if he be alive now and a pirate!"

"A pirate! Jesse?" said Margaret, rising as her ear caught the words. "It is a lie! How dare you think so? He would have stood by his captain if all the rest had left him. Oh, you did not know him, or you would never say such a thing;" and she turned away, and left the room before her uncle could answer.

Dr. Halton called Edward into his study, and told him what had happened, and was distressed to see that the same misgiving occurred to him directly.

"Was Freeman murdered, then, or was he one of the pirates? We must find that out," said Edward. "Poor Margaret!"

"I hinted it to her. I am sorry I did so," said Dr. Halton. "She says he is dead, for he would stand by his captain; but then she would be sure to think that."

"Yes, of course. She thought he married

her with no thought of her money," said Edward scornfully. "He was a thorough rascal, and as likely as not to have been the chief instigator of the mutiny. But we must hope he may have met with his deserts, and been killed by his comrades by now, as we hear nothing of his being alive."

"We shall do well to find that out, Edward," Dr. Theodore said, somewhat doubtfully however.

"I shall find it out," replied his son, in such a matter-of-fact tone that his father was inclined to exclaim,—

"Have you no feeling for her,—possibly the wife of a murderer and pirate?"

But Edward looked so thoroughly businesslike that Dr. Theodore feared he should be thought womanish and sensational if he said anything of the kind; so he soon changed the subject, and asked what his brother had done about certain railway shares.

"Consulted his own interests more than he has yours, sir," Edward replied; "and it is my own opinion that if you do not come home quickly, you will lose a couple of

thousand pounds in that matter, and more too perhaps."

"Do you think so, Edward? Well, perhaps I have been away too long. I will see if your mother feels equal to coming home this summer, but I am afraid she won't like to pass the summer in London."

"And I think it would be a great pity if she did, sir. And Robert Evanshaw has come here, to ask if you can let his father keep the house another year. But why should you and my mother not go to Rawlstone? Margaret will be put in possession of the house next August, and she cannot live there alone. At present it is empty; the tenant is gone, and it is in Uncle John's hands; so you can take it from him, and as soon as it is given over to Margaret, she is sure to wish you to stay there with her. At all events you need not be in London this summer if mamma does not like it. You can come back here, or go to Naples next winter, but you should come to England for a few months. My sisters ought to see home again. If they do not return now, they will not be likely to marry well."

"I am sure I do not care if they do," said his father. "I think a woman is often much better off if she does not marry. Think of Margaret: she would have been happy if she had not."

"Well, perhaps Gertrude would not think so," said Edward drily. "At least, sir, she should see English society before she makes up her mind to marry a Frenchman; and that is what will happen, if you stay here or in Paris."

This view of the case so frightened Dr. Theodore, that he gave his mind seriously to returning, and began to talk the matter over with his wife.

"I am so glad there is a hope of going home," said Gertrude in confidence to her brother. "I wanted so much to go back. If we stay here much longer, papa's friends will have forgotten him, or that he has any daughters at all; and Aunt Anne, who is quite ready now to chaperone us, will have grown tired of waiting. I don't suppose it would matter to Florence, because she does not care for going out, but I do, and so does Margaret,

though now she looks so sad, and says she is ill, and can't come downstairs. Edward, was it her lover on board that ship? You know all about it, I am sure."

"Yes. But I am not going to tell you. Papa told you not to ask, and you know you are mean in asking me."

"I thought I was not to ask Margaret herself. I did not know papa wished me to be kept in ignorance always. But, Edward, I know, for papa told me, she had a dear friend who was drowned at sea. Was it a man or a woman?"

"Oh, a man, of course. Now don't ask me any more questions. Well, I don't know why I should not tell you. He was a wretched scamp in Sandmouth whom she took a fancy to. We got him sent out of her way, because we saw how it would end. It was Uncle John's fault for leaving her there so long. He was a low, common fellow, and it would have been a disgraceful affair. I hoped she had forgotten him, but this unlucky story of shipwreck seems to have reminded her of him. Now mind, Gerty, not

a word to Florrie, nor even to mamma, for she is not to be worried about Margaret's affairs; nor even to papa, for I ought not to have told you. Remember."

"You may trust me thoroughly, Edward," said Gertrude, unconscious how little of the truth had been entrusted to her keeping. "I understand, now, poor girl! why she looks so wretched if ever one talks of foolish attachments and unequal marriages. Was she much attached to him?"

"Now, Gerty! You are breaking your promise,—asking questions, and making me sorry I trusted to your honour. I see how it will end: you will go asking papa, and there will be no end of a row. I will never trust any girl again."

"Oh, don't say so, Edward," said Gertrude, for with this threat her brother had always kept her in order. "You are mistaken. I have said all I meant to say, and you shall see I can keep faith. No one shall ever know you have told me. Don't be angry, please; I will be silent."

Gertrude kept her word and the secret;

but her behaviour towards Margaret betrayed more sympathy and tenderness than it had ever done, and was a marked contrast to her demeanour of the last three months, during which time she had been growing very jealous of her father's increasing affection for his niece. But now she devoted herself to her cousin, trying to stand between her and any further distress, and finding excuses to keep her away from the family circle, when she saw she wished to be alone. May kept much in her own room on the plea of headache, and Gertrude aided and abetted her, waiting upon her and dissuading every one else from going to her; and by this interference on Gerty's part, Aunt Alice was spared any fresh anxiety about her niece, and did not perceive that she was suffering from any mental distress. Margaret herself was resolved to conceal her grief from her aunt, and was so intent upon dissembling her agitation that she did not discover that Gertrude had some understanding of it; but she recognised her kindly feelings towards her, and was grateful for that.

Edward was very anxious to see his cousin, to suggest to her the idea of their returning to England and going to Rawlstone; but she only came down stairs when he was out with Florence; and whenever he said to Gertrude, "Don't you think she could bear a little talking for a few minutes?" the self-constituted Argus shook her head, and said Margaret was very unwell.

Gertrude had long felt sure that May disliked Edward, and now that he admitted having had a share in sending her lover out of the way, she recognised there were sufficient grounds for this dislike. So she kept him away from her, but she told May of the question under deliberation, for she herself was much annoyed at the idea of going to Rawlstone.

"Such a lonely, desolate place, with no shops nearer than Yarmouth, and no society! We shall be buried alive. Do say you would like it to be let again to some tenant."

But May's eyes lighted up with pleasure.

"Oh, I would so like to go there!" she

cried ; and in less than half an hour she was downstairs, pleading the cause of Rawlstone with an earnestness that enraged Gertrude, delighted Edward, and finally carried Dr. Theodore completely away.

“Indeed, it is reason enough that you would like it, my dear,” he said, suddenly coming round to the decision to which his son had been vainly trying to bring him for the last three days. “You are right : you ought to grow acquainted with the poor people of the neighbourhood before you are called upon to undertake the duties of a proprietor, and of course you could not live there alone. We will all come to Rawlstone this summer, if your Aunt Alice does not mind.”

As Aunt Alice, yielding to Edward, had been saying all the morning that she wanted to go there, this appeal to her wishes was equivalent to a settlement of the question, and Edward wrote to Mr. John Halton forthwith.

Robert Evanshaw, who came every day to know Dr. Theodore's decision, was now told

his father could remain in Murchison Square a year longer ; and he wrote home this satisfactory intelligence, but he himself stayed at Nice to see if he could give the Haltons any help in preparing for their journey.

“ Conceited young puppy ! ” said Dr. Theodore, when he heard this from Edward. “ What good can he be ? Why, Margaret is worth three of him ; and while you are with us, how can he be wanted ? He is an idiot ! ”

“ He is a good man of business, nevertheless,” said Edward ; but he wasted no more breath in praising his friend, but left him to find his own level in the estimation of the ladies.

CHAPTER VI.

RAWLSTONE AT LAST.

By the beginning of May they were all in England. As there was no house for them in London, they only stayed there a few days at an hotel, and went to Norwich to stop there, while they ascertained if Rawlstone Hall were in a habitable state for them. It had been let with its furniture nearly twelve years, and might reasonably be supposed to be out of order ; but John Halton objected to making any alterations there while he was responsible for it, and a family long accustomed to the shifts and miseries of foreign housekeeping was not inclined to see deficiencies in any English home ; so in less than a fortnight they were domiciled in the old manor house. May had left it when she was eight years old, and had retained a vivid remembrance of the cliff, the old oaks, stunted by the rough winds, and the grey stone front of the house, stained and

weatherworn with storms. She remembered the village too, the little gardens dovetailed in amongst the barley-fields, and the broken figure-heads of ships standing among the flowers and apple-trees. She went from house to house, recalling herself to the old people, and receiving with real pleasure the repeated assurances of her looking like her father's own child, and in the same breath that she was just her mother over again.

"And so ye remember this garden, Miss, and the beehives, do ye? Just to think! And do you remember John, as used to take you to see the cows, and Robert, who used to row your papa in the boat?"

"You don't mind me, Miss Cressingham; but I used to be up at the house when you was a little one."

These were speeches that met her at every turn, and the villagers seemed to consider that the advent of Miss Cressingham among them was to be the commencement of the golden age.

Dr. Theodore observed there would be a great danger of her spoiling the people by

her injudicious benevolence ; but he himself went into the cottages, and being thoroughly shocked at the absence of ventilation that he found there, took paper and pencil and pointed out to his niece how they should be altered and enlarged.

“Fortunately, only half a dozen of them belong to Margaret, so the whole village will not be pulled down,” said Edward. And Mr. White, the bailiff, who had managed the land ever since Mr. Churchill Cressingham’s death, took heart of grace when he heard him say this, and began to hope that there might be one clear head in the family to guide his young mistress that was to be, for he mistrusted Dr. Halton, and disliked Miss Cressingham’s energy extremely.

Dr. Halton had come down to Rawlstone in a fever of delight, preparing to try every new theory of scientific farming on his niece’s land ; and was much dismayed to find the bailiff, not only perfectly ignorant of all that he ought to know about phosphates and steam-ploughs, but doggedly determined not to learn anything on the subject.

"That man must go," he said to May, as he came back, flustered and cross after a long and fruitless discussion with the sturdy bailiff, who withstood his best arguments by the simple logic of a determination not to be convinced. "You must send him away, my dear, and I'll get a better man in his place for you."

And after some argument, Margaret was brought to see that the man must go, while she and her uncle managed the land between them. The project suited her fancy exactly. She applied herself diligently to learning the duties of a landholder. She went over all the accounts, and with a map of the farm in her hand, walked through all the fields, noting down the crops, and asking the size of every corn-stack and root-camp, the value of each cottage, and the wages of each labourer.

"We must pension Mr. White off, I suppose," she said. "It would be but fair; and besides, his ill-will might be very inconvenient to us."

"He is a pig-headed fool, or he would have been glad to have his ideas improved," Dr. Halton said. "I shall be glad when he goes."

After the harvest I think we must speak to him."

Edward came down in July, when the harvest was beginning, and heard of the conspiracy hatching against the ill-fated White. He championed him stoutly.

"Well, she will be an idiot if she gets rid of him, that's all; and you, sir, will make a great mistake if you encourage her to do it. He is a good farmer; at least," he added, anticipating an exclamation from his father, "he understands the pig-headed and ignorant labourers here; and can make them carry out his ideas, such as he has, while Margaret will be utterly unable to make them work at all. Until, sir, you can find a first-rate man, trained in the new practices of scientific farming, you had best advise her to keep on with White."

"But she will not have a bailiff at all; she intends to manage everything herself," said Dr. Theodore; "and she will have my help."

"Do you think a girl like her is competent to manage a farm of six hundred acres,

and in the winter, too, when the land is covered with frost and snow?" said Edward, sneeringly. "And is she going to bury herself alive here all the year, when you and my mother come back to London? which, for Gertrude's sake, I hope you intend to do. She must have a bailiff."

"But not an ignorant, conceited blockhead like that. I will find some younger man, with modern ideas, and whom I can educate to be a practical chemist and scientific farmer."

Edward turned away, to hide his very irreverent amusement, and contented himself with remarking,—

"I should merely suggest that she does not pull the old house down by way of a beginning."

"Ah, ah. She is very likely to try," said Dr. Theodore; "but I shall be here, and give her advice; and I shall turn her attention to chemistry as applied to the improvement of land and crops, as soon as we have got rid of the present incumbrance." By which term he intended to designate White.

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But while May apparently gave her whole mind to the subject of crops and soils, or improvements in the labourers' cottages, her thoughts were painfully occupied with the recollection of the one who was to have shared Rawlstone with her. If she could have forgotten him, while the sight of the wide blue sea, and the white sails of distant vessels, brought him continually to mind, her occasional visits to Yarmouth would alone have revived all memories. She never passed the farmhouse where Mr. White lived, and which she had planned to live in with Jesse, without a shiver; and sometimes her cousins saw the paleness that spread over her cheek, as she caught sight of the bailiff's house amid the trees, and wondered at it, without, however, connecting her agitation with the sight of that particular object.

Margaret had an added pain to bear, in the consciousness that her uncle held so cruel an opinion of Jesse, as to suppose it possible he could have been one of the murderers of his captain. Dr. Theodore was too considerate to hint at the possibility of Jesse's being

alive, and leading a pirate's life; but he sometimes did say he feared he might have been one of the mutineers.

She heard him with bitter indignation. She thought he was trying to prove him a pirate, in order to destroy her love for his memory. She remembered Jesse, so true and gentle, so incapable of any cruelty, that she knew it was an impossibility for him to have joined the mutineers; unless, and a dreadful thought would suggest itself now and then, unless he had, in the despair of his grief in losing her, given way to the temptation of drink, and grown a madman under it, as John Hathaway had done with less excuse. Then, indeed, if he were drunk, what might he not have done under the influence of his comrades. Would he have been faithful to his captain, and flown to his assistance, to die fighting bravely in his behalf? The cruel scepticism of her uncle began to have effect on her. Her faith in Jesse was shaken; she was struggling continually with a terrible suspicion, and she could not free herself from it.

“Oh, what am I, that I should think so

wickedly of him who was so much better and truer than I am? Am I not worse than a murderer to think such evil of him when he cannot defend himself?" she thought, in an agony of compunction. "Oh, Jesse, my own, own, true love, can I so wrong you—so insult your memory? They shall not make me so false to you. They shall not."

And she settled that she would seize the first opportunity to go to Filby, and see the cottage where he had made her a home, and where she had last seen him; and the sight of it, she fondly believed, would drive away the horrible ideas that her uncle had implanted in her mind, and re-establish her belief in her husband's worth, and his honourable death.

Margaret supposed that it was her uncle John who had originated this theory of Jesse's degradation and crime; but, in fact, John Halton was far from sharing the fears of his brother and nephew, as to Freeman's having joined the crew in murdering the captain. Of course, the thing was possible, he admitted; but it did not follow that because a man

was guilty of forgery, he should turn pirate, when he had so much to gain by remaining on good terms with society, which was Freeman's case, as he would see if he used his wits. He, therefore, was as likely as not to have refused to join in the mutiny, and, as a consequence, have been murdered himself. If he had been alive now, Josiah or they would have heard of him. Josiah wrote every six months to make his report, and claim the pension that Mr. Halton had promised to continue as long as he stayed in America, and kept his brother's marriage a secret. Mr. Halton had been compelled to offer this bribe in the hope the marriage could be proved null, and had to promise to continue it when he ascertained that the marriage was legal; for he had no longer the means of proving the forgery, and by fear of punishment of keeping Jesse Freeman out of England. He pensioned Josiah, therefore, to ensure his co-operation; and Josiah wrote regularly. He had sent all the particulars of the loss of the *Astoria* as they were first reported. She had been seen to founder in a comparatively quiet sea; and as no

boats were seen with any of her crew afterwards, it was supposed all hands had perished. The facts of the mutiny had only transpired two years later, owing to a sailor convicted of murder at New York being found in possession of a watch belonging to Captain Sumner; and a confession of the murder of the captain and four of the crew was gradually drawn from him. But as to the names of his partners in crime, or as to what had become of them, he either would not or could not give any clue. The pirates had steered the ship on its original course, until near the coast of Florida, when they took out the gold, which had been their object of pursuit, and taking the boats, abandoned the ship, which they previously scuttled, and left to go down when they should have pulled ashore.

These particulars Mr. Halton now learned from Josiah, who excused himself for not having sent the news before, by saying that he knew nothing of the late discovery about the mutiny except what the newspapers told him, and that, if his brother were alive, he would certainly have come to him, or written

to give him information of his existence. So that Mr. Halton told Edward he was left perfectly comfortable, and had no fear that Jesse would turn up again. "It would be a dreadful thing if he did, you know, after killing the captain. And yet, no one could prove it so as to have a case against him."

"Just what I am afraid of," said Edward, grimly. But his uncle said,—

"It is no use going out to find troubles. I have no fears at all;" and he pushed the decanter towards his nephew.

Nevertheless, it was with a feeling of great relief that Mr. Halton saw the time come, which would release him from his responsibilities as a guardian. He could not help now and then contemplating the possibility of Jesse's reappearing; not that there seemed any doubt of his death, but still it was remotely possible he might be alive, and Mr. Halton trusted that if such a misfortune were in the book of fate, it would not occur until after he had resigned his guardianship, and Margaret would have to manage her affairs by herself. As June passed into July, he remembered with

satisfaction that in August she would be of age, and he should be set free.

"No one can ever know what a burden this wardship has been to me," he said to his wife. "If I had only foreseen what it has entailed, I never would have allowed poor Churchill to appoint me guardian—but he was always rash."

"Yes, dear; I am glad it is nearly over," said his wife, somewhat puzzled that her husband should have felt his guardianship so onerous a burden, for she had been kept in the most complete ignorance of all his troubles with his refractory niece,—for the best of all reasons: that she never could keep anything a secret from her many friends. Her husband loved her in his own way, but he never entrusted any secret to her, and she never had any idea of what he had had to endure in the guardianship of Margaret.

Margaret looked forward to August with dread and anxiety, for she would have to meet John Halton and the lawyers; and amongst them, the fact of her being married, and the disappearance of her husband, must

be acknowledged and discovered. The thought was agony to her. The mere meeting with John Halton, whom she had hitherto successfully avoided, would be in itself great distress; but to hear him talk of her marriage, stigmatizing Jesse as a villain and scoundrel, would be a humiliation she could not bear. She would not bear it. If the story had to be told, she would take the word out of his mouth, and tell the tale herself boldly, as if she were not ashamed of herself, and certainly not of her husband. On that point there should be no doubt. Her hearers might form what opinions they pleased of him, but they should not be able to say she had ever repented marrying him.

But the idea of this confession and this interview with John Halton, whom she had not seen since he came to her at Mrs. Flint's house, to tell her Jesse was a rogue and a criminal, was a continual torture to her; and her temper was irritated and chafed to such a point that she could hardly keep command over it. Two, nay, only one year ago, she would have welcomed the chance of acknow-

ledging her husband, and gloried in confessing her love for him. Then he was a hero in her eyes, and worthy of all love; but the effect of education and intercourse with intellectual minds, had, as Josiah prophesied long ago it would, made her ashamed of the rough, illiterate sailor, and forget his real merits in the consideration of his utter ignorance. When she had loved and married him, there was little to choose between them in point of refinement, and certainly not in intellect. But she felt now a sense of degradation in the reflection that she had given herself to one so inferior to all her friends and relatives. He was utterly beneath her she knew, and it was a pain to remember it. And her uncle believed that he had sunk lower still before his death,—sunk into crime.

She would not allow this; she rejected the thought as impious; she was resolved to trust him, and do honour to his memory; and in this spirit she went on her pilgrimage to Filby.

She watched for the opportunity to go unperceived; and one day, when her uncle and aunt

had driven over to Yarmouth, and Gertrude and Florence were rambling among the fern and heather that covered the cliff between Rawlstone and the sea, she went to the stables, ordered a strong pony to be harnessed to the light chaise, and drove herself away alone through the lanes in the direction of Filby. It was a long drive of twelve miles; but the pony went quickly, and at last she felt sure she was near her goal. She looked eagerly around as certain landmarks told her she was approaching the place she knew so well. At length she reached the lane itself and turned into it. Her heart was beating wildly and her eyes were dim with tears.

"I remember that oak-tree and that gate," she said, as she turned to look for the cottage, for it seemed to her she must have passed it, as she was in sight of the tavern at the crossroads. She turned the pony, and drove back, but could not find it, nor its companion tenement. She thought she must have mistaken the lane, and yet an old apple-tree in the hedge seemed familiar to her. She turned again at the end of the lane where it joined the Filby Road, and

once more drove back towards the tavern. A strange misgiving came over her as she got down from the chaise, and walked towards the apple-tree. An old man came up, bending under a load of wood : he stopped to look at the chaise.

"Were there not two cottages here?" she asked, trembling with excitement. She had to repeat the question before he understood it.

"Ay, yes, there were," he replied slowly. "One by the pond there, and one by where you stand ; but they was pulled down a year back."

"Pulled down!" Margaret stood aghast, looking at him, and then at the yellow corn, as if unable to take in his words, till slowly the cruel truth dawned on her. Pulled down! his cottage gone! all that was left of Jesse swept away, and not a vestige left! She had come there as to the grave of one who had no grave but the wide sea; and the house was gone, the garden ploughed up, and the corn growing on the hearthstone.

For a minute or two she was silent, like

a dumb animal, unable to speak its protest against the world's cruelty; and then she threw herself on the ground, with a long wail of despair.

"Gone, gone, all gone, and nothing left for me!" she moaned over and over again, heedless of the old man, who stood still looking at her pityingly and wonderingly, wishing to comfort her, and not knowing what to say. For a time he let her go on crying; but then, as if he thought it time to stop such senseless grief, he said, slowly, and as if to himself more than to her,—

"Yes; a' pulled them down, and 'said there was too many poor folk lived in the parish, and made poor-rates heavy; so a' pulled 'em down. They were two nice places though."

"Who pulled them down? Who dared?" cried Margaret, in a sudden burst of passion. "This one they had no right to touch. Its master was away. Who pulled it down?"

"Why, the landlord, Mr. Gates. That is his land."

"And how could he touch this cottage?"

It had belonged to people in Lincolnshire for many years."

"Ah; that's what the woman said as lived in it. She said it was not his'n to pull down; but it warn't hers nor her husband's, they found, and she couldn't say where the folks were as it belonged to. They were gone to America, she said; and Master Gates he say if ever they be like to come back, they could get compensation from him, if it warn't his'n to do as he like with, and standing all among his barley, and he warn't a going to have so many poor folk on his place. So he pulled 'em down."

May was crying again more bitterly than before, but at these last words she looked up, and asked,—

"And where did they go; Tebbs and— whoever lived here?"

"John Tebbs is dead and his missus; and William Tebbs and his'n are gone away to America, I think; that was afore the place was pulled down though," said the old man. "The folks as lived here then, and had to turn out, work now on the Crossroads Farm,

and they has to walk nigh from Yarmouth here every morning and back again in the evening. It's hard work for 'em."

"To lessen the poor-rates here!" said Margaret. "How does it do that?" She spoke half to him, half to herself, while her eyes were roving over the ripe corn, finding traces of the cottage in the thinner growth of the crop over its floor.

"They are pulling down some cottages in Filby now, miss, to do it. Master Gates won't have one fresh one built lest more poor folks come there to live. It's hard on us though, who have lived there all our lives."

Margaret was hardly heeding him, though she afterwards recalled every word he said.

"Tell me, are any of the Burtons living there now? Old Joe Burton, and Sam, the sailor?"

The old man shook his head.

"They all left some time back. Sam Burton was drowned when Lockwood's boat went ashore, and the old man died some weeks after. Sam's wife was here when this cottage was pulled down, but she was a crazy

body, never in her right mind since her husband were lost."

"Was the lugger lost, too?" Margaret asked faintly. "Where was Master Lockwood himself, and his sons?"

"Do you mean the master of the lugger, ma'am? She were a Sandmouth boat; that's up the coast, up there in Lincolnshire, maybe you know. He was drowned, and all on board, every one of 'em, with Sam Burton, and they was all buried up there in the churchyard, by the tombstone with the ship on it. Shall I show you the way?"

"No, no; I would rather go alone. Oh, but if you will,"—said Margaret, recollecting herself,—"if you will take my pony to the Crossroads and get him fed, and don't say you have seen me; don't speak of me to any one,—and here is money," she added, giving him a half-sovereign; "and bring him back here in two hours, when he is rested; but don't talk about me, you understand."

"Will you be here then in two hours?" said the old labourer, taking the pony's rein; and he led him away wondering within him-

self if the lady were crazy, and half inclined to send some one to watch her. "She speaks right, though, and as if she knowed what she were about, and could take care of herself," he concluded; "and there's no one near here like to do her any mischief. I'll take the pony on to the inn, and then come back and stay here where I can see her. Certain if she be crazy, it is not a helpless way like neither."

Margaret went up to the churchyard and found the tombstone, on which some old sailor had inscribed a couplet, likening his earthly pilgrimage to the course of a ship, across the trackless waste of waters towards a far-off haven; and, to enforce his meaning, had carved above the lines, a ship in full sail, and painted in appropriate colours, as if fresh from the docks. The paint was much rubbed off now, and the words were somewhat less clear, but she stopped to read them, and to look over the churchyard wall at the glittering sea lying beyond the fields, blue, bright, and smiling, and then she turned to glance at a stone cross placed over another grave,

with a French name on it, and a Latin prayer; near it another cross of black wood, painted in white letters, gave the name of a little child: "Pierre Bastien died here on board the *Sainte Marie*, from Havre." The wind had broken off one arm of the cross, and it lay on the turf. May took it up, and replaced it for a moment on high, to read the words; and then turned to another grave.

"Sacred to the memory of James Lockwood, of Sandmouth, who was drowned at sea, the first day of December; and to the memory of John and George Lockwood, who were drowned with him; also of Sam Burton and——" There were three more names of men not buried here, but left under the deep waters, with the wreck of their ship strewn round them. George Lockwood had been Jesse's friend and playmate. May sat down on the turf by the grave, and rested her head against the upright stone, seeing all the past coming back before her: Lockwood and the boys pushing off their boats from shore; Sam, and poor giddy Betty, her companion in her folly, and like herself, left alone—and

widowed. A crowd of faces rose before her memory, all now far away, or dead. She was alone, unless—oh horror of horrors!—her uncle's dreadful supposition proved a true one, and Jesse lived, a villain—a murderer. God help her if it were so! God help him! It could not be true; they were all driving her mad. No; he was dead; faithful and manly to the last, as he had lived. She knew it; she knew that Lockwood had said he was a lad he could trust. She remembered Will Cousins saying he had sailed with him, and knew what he was worth. She would think of all this, and not be false to him now that he could not defend himself, any more than she had been when they accused him of forgery, and she would not believe it. She stooped, and kissed reverently the names of the old sailor and his two brave boys, once Jesse's friends, and then rose and passed through the churchyard back to the lane; and went, regardless of Master Gates's barley, to walk round what had once been her own cottage, and measure out the foundations from wall to wall. She stayed there till the old man

brought back the pony, and then she gave him another present, and strictly charged him not to speak of her to any one, and drove herself home. She went to her own room, pleaded fatigue, and remained by herself for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER VII.

UNPROTECTED BY LAW.

AUGUST came; and with it, the day on which Margaret became the mistress of Rawlstone Hall and her other property, which was well invested, and paid good interest. John Halton came down with Mr. Quillett, the family lawyer, to resign his trust and his responsibilities. It was a terrible day to Margaret.

Mr. Quillett came a few hours first. Dr. Theodore asked Margaret to come and speak to him; and, to her surprise, told her that he had long since known of her marriage; that it was he who had investigated and settled its legality; and that she would find him her real friend and counsellor. Thus encouraged, she went into the library, and received him with comparative tranquillity.

As soon as she was seated, Mr. Quillett informed her that no other lawyer, not even his own clerk, had been entrusted with the

secret of her marriage; for it was Mr. Halton's wish that it should be entirely ignored and unacknowledged, as it in no ways rendered his giving up his guardianship easier or more pleasant. If "the late Mr. Freeman," as Mr. Quillett ceremoniously called him, were alive, and ever to come back, he would have to prove the marriage, and claim his wife's property; but until he appeared, and made that claim, John Halton intended to ignore the marriage, or treat it as null, seeing that he had no power to help his niece in any safe bestowal of her property.

Margaret listened to the lawyer in astonishment. A new light was dawning upon her. She had always thought her marriage would give her husband power to protect her property; but never imagined that she had already parted with it to him. For the first time, she realised how helpless was her own position, if he had survived, and should return to England. Nevertheless, she was determined they should all think she was longing to hear he was alive.

"If I have to sign any papers, must I

use my present name, or my real one?" she said, blushing deeply as she spoke.

"Oh, your present one, of course; because you know, or you ought to know, that if he is alive at this moment, your signature is really not worth anything to us. Mr. Halton and I should want his as well. But you would not admit the marriage you know; and we should compel him to prove it. No one knows anything of it; and it is not our business to announce it. The onus of proof should rest on him if he ever comes."

"Yes; if it comes to the worst?" Dr. Theodore began.

"The worst!" cried Margaret, passionately. "It has come to the worst already. He is dead: you may be sure of it."

"It would be a comfort to know it," said Dr. Halton, as he left the room. May burst into tears. The words called up all her lingering love for her husband; and she forgot everything but his cruel death.

Mr. Quillett mistook the cause of her grief.

"I wish indeed it were otherwise, my dear lady," he said. "I suppose there is no real

danger that the late Mr. Freeman,—ahem, should return; but I wish, indeed, your father had settled some portion of your money, or else this house and land, upon yourself. It would have spared much perplexity.”

Margaret knew well she had only to thank her own stolen marriage for this and all future difficulties.

“But you—you tell me; for you will tell me the truth, and they will not,” she said, “because they hate him. You tell me, this house and land is mine. Is it mine, really,—mine to do what I like with, entirely?”

Mr. Quillett shook his head. “You married without any settlement; and therefore, I take it, he is, during your life, the rightful tenant of your freeholds.”

“Yes; but not against my wish. That is, supposing I ever should wish him not to be,” said May, true to her determination of appearing to still hope for Jesse’s return. “Not against my wish—he could not live here.”

“Certainly he could. He is entitled to your freeholds for your joint lives; but the ultimate inheritance is not his.”

"Never mind the inheritance ; I would like him to have that. But tell me plainly,—Could he come back and live here, even if I were to quarrel with him ? Tell me the plain truth."

"Yes, he could," Mr. Quillett answered reluctantly. "The husband is the sole tenant of his wife's freeholds as long as she is alive ; and he might, even without her consent, sell or lease them to the extent of his interest in them,—that is for as long as she lives."

"Then if he is alive, this house is not mine," said Margaret, her voice faltering ; "and he might sell it away from me, and put strangers in it for as long as I live."

"My dear Miss Cressingham, we must not go out to meet trouble half way. He is most probably dead, or he would have been heard of before now. Did I hear aright that he drank ?"

"No," answered Margaret, almost fiercely. "That is false,—as false as that he ever did anything wrong. I am not afraid, if he does come back. I trust he may, some day." But her heart sank, as she uttered this bold defiance ; and in her secret soul, she knew that

she wished he might never come back, to claim her and disgrace her.

Mr. Quillett saw perfectly well that she was trying to deceive him; but he liked her rather the better for it. "She is a brave-hearted woman," he said to himself; and while talking to her about her property, and the business now before them, he contrived to let her see that he sympathised with her, and thought not only she, but even Jesse, had been hardly dealt with; and she soon began to feel he was a real friend, and far more to be consulted than her uncle Theodore. Soothed and fortified by the consciousness of his sympathy, she found it possible to meet Mr. John Halton calmly and civilly; though to see him at Rawlstone, where she had vowed he never should set foot, was a humiliation, and she felt his congratulations upon her coming of age a positive insult. In truth, John Halton might have spared them; for to nobody but himself was the termination of his guardianship a gain. If Freeman were alive, Margaret was now utterly unprotected against him—supposing he were really the villain John Halton thought him.

After the lawyer was gone, Uncle John did begin: "I think you know that we have made every inquiry as to the possible existence of that man; but——"

But Margaret had clutched his arm: "I know everything," she answered, quietly; but her fingers seemed to close into his flesh, and her clear complexion flushed so deep a crimson that Mr. Halton was frightened. He hardly confessed such a feeling to himself, but he was very glad when she let go his arm, and abruptly left him. He did not see her again till next day.

Mr. Halton had no intention of insulting or humiliating his niece; he felt a certain degree of pity for her unfortunate position, tempered with a keen recollection of the annoyance her misconduct had caused him, which made him forget to tell her how much he pitied her. But as to actively condemning her offences now that she was the mistress of Rawlstone Hall, and of sixty thousand pounds besides, in good investments, he was not so presumptuous. He knew she had made an unlucky bargain for herself, and he devoutly hoped that rascal

would never turn up ; but if he did, the shame and distress would now fall upon Margaret herself, and he need not have anything to do with it, except through his lawyers. So he pardoned his niece for her disobedience to himself, and finished his stay at Rawlstone in high good-humour.

But to Margaret, every tone of his voice, every turn of his face, conveyed a meaning quite different from what the owner of voice or face intended, or was conscious of. With all the ingenuity of an over-irritated mind, she imagined a covert sneer or a hidden allusion in his words ; and often her lips were bitten till the blood came, in her determination to be silent when she was on the point of breaking out into a passionate burst of hatred and reproach. Dr. Theodore and Aunt Alice, both profoundly impressed with the general goodness of human nature, and more quick to see good than evil, had neither of them any idea of the storms that often agitated the heart of poor Margaret, who, ill-trained and mismanaged from infancy, had only one kind of self-control—the power to hide, not to sub-

due, passion. Gertrude, in many things quicker than her parents, understood far more of her cousin's real temper; and Edward could never have any doubt concerning it.

That Margaret was now the real mistress of the house, made very little difference to the family circle, except that Edward no longer paid frequent visits; but Aunt Alice still presided at the head of the table, and Dr. Theodore invited his scientific friends down to see him. He had an idea that there would be fossils found in the rocks. His wife's health was improving so fast, that she ventured to hope she need not go abroad again for the winter; and proposed to try the climate of the south coast or the Isle of Wight. Mrs. John Halton immediately suggested that Gertrude and Margaret should come to her in town for the winter. This proposition filled Gertrude with delight; but May declined it with more energy than decorum.

"Aunt John chaperone me!" she exclaimed indignantly. "No, indeed; I will go nowhere; unless you, Aunt Alice, take me. Aunt John! why, I never saw her in my life."

"But that is no reason for refusing her hospitality, now we can't go to Murchison Square, is it?" said Gertrude, laughing. "But seriously, Margaret, you will not see any society at all, if you go with mamma and Florence to Ventnor."

"I shall stop here by myself," said May. But Gertrude exclaimed it was nonsense, and, what was more to the purpose, Aunt Alice said so too. Margaret could not live at Rawlstone alone. She need not, if she did not like, accept her Aunt Anne's offer. She could come to Ventnor while Gertrude went to London; but she must not stay at Rawlstone.

Mrs. Bird, Dr. Theodore's old housekeeper, should be sent for, and put in charge of the house; and Aunt Alice strongly counselled her niece to accept Mrs. John Halton's hospitality.

But Margaret was unpersuadable.

"Not at all. I would rather stay here, but if Florence would like to go to London, I will take care of you, Aunt Alice, at Ventnor."

"Florence does not care for society, and is not old enough to enjoy it. She can take care of me," said Mrs. Halton.

"Well, then, you can invite me to Ventnor if you like; but if you don't, I'll stay here," said May; "but to London I will not go."

"Never?"

"Not till you have a house to invite me to, and perhaps not then. Aunt Alice," May said, as Gertrude left the room, and they two were alone, "you know, you must know, why I hate Uncle John, and why I never will go to his house. Why do you ask it?"

May saw by her aunt's look of startled surprise, that the idea of a lasting hatred on her niece's part towards John Halton was utterly strange, and at first incomprehensible. Aunt Alice had been away in France at the time of May's elopement, and it had all been as carefully concealed from her as from Aunt Anne, until she was told of the poor girl's marriage and widowhood all at once, and hurried over from Paris to nurse her in her illness. But she had asked no questions of

her, and Dr. Theodore had told her as little as he could, nor did he know all the harshness of his brother towards his delinquent niece. As it was his hope to make Margaret forget the past, he had begged his wife not to talk to her upon the subject, so that it was only by the care with which Aunt Alice abstained from ever asking any questions that May could guess she knew her history and pitied her. Mrs. Halton's delicate health had induced in all her family a habit of keeping agitating questions from her as much as possible, for she was of a most sympathising nature, and entered into the feelings of any sufferer with a keenness that was dangerous for herself. So Dr. Halton never told her more than he could help of her niece's misfortunes, and nothing whatever of the dreadful uncertainty that now hung over them. For this uncertainty was becoming a great dread both to Dr. Theodore and to Edward, and even John was less confident than he had been.

There was no reason for feeling sure that Freeman was dead because he had not yet

reappeared. There would have been no sense in his coming before Margaret had attained her twenty-first year, and if he had been engaged in piracy on the high seas, he might prefer to wait a little time, until the affair was forgotten. If piracy could be proved against him by any tribunal in America, then he might be safely imprisoned, and she would be safe for a time; but if he were not already apprehended, and expiating his misdeeds in some gaol, there was very little hope that anything could be substantiated against him.

It was a most awkward dilemma; and though they wrote again and again to Josiah, he could tell them nothing.

"He will come sooner or later," said Dr. Theodore; "and then God help her!"

"But we shall be able to insist on a judicial separation," said Edward. "Indeed, if he is not a thorough fool, he will agree to a compromise at once, take Enderby Grange and half the money, and leave her the farm at Rawlstone. I am afraid we should have some difficulty in actually proving his crimes, but we could make his position very un-

comfortable by telling all we know about him. It would require a strong amount of courage for him to face public opinion when all was told."

"But what if he be a desperate man, and indifferent to public opinion? What if he be a fool?" said Dr. Theodore. "And a gambler, perhaps."

"And I should be very much annoyed if she tried to get a judicial separation," said John Halton. "It would be most unpleasant to us all, to be trumpeting his misdeeds abroad. And her disgrace would affect us. No, no; if he comes—and I trust he won't—but if he does, she had best make the best of it, and submit. She chose him, and she must abide by it."

"Never! while I have a roof over my head," cried Theodore, indignantly. "Would you desert your own sister's child? I will track out his past life and his crimes, and no court in England will refuse to protect her, when it is known what the wretch has been. She shall be legally separated from him, and be my child as much as my own

daughters. He can take everything she has, I know. But one comfort is, he can't sell the land; and when he dies—and he will die soon—she will have it again.”

“Well, I doubt whether she would not prefer being left in her own house and receiving him back, to becoming a beggar, and proclaiming her disgrace everywhere,” said John. “I shall certainly advise her to do so if he comes.”

“If he comes,” was the keynote of all their reflections. Nothing was heard of him, though they inquired far and wide.

“Ah! if they had left me with him, I should never have grown different to what I was then,” thought Margaret to herself. “He would have remained honest, and I should have been as uneducated as he was, and a happy woman; and now, if he is alive, O God, what shall I do?”

She had forgotten all her resolves to think of him as true to the last. She could not shake off the terrible dread of his return. It haunted her always; and when occasionally she saw her uncle looking sadly at her, as if

some strange foreboding occupied his mind, she answered in her heart that it was too fearfully possible.

Her only hope was that Jesse might be amenable to reason, and retaining still his old generosity of character, when he found she no longer loved him, would accept the compromise of half her fortune, and go and live at Enderby, which, from its vicinity to Sandmouth, seemed a proper home for him. She trusted in this, and recalled to herself how many good qualities of heart he had possessed, and how unlikely it was he should insist on coming to insult her and drive her to madness by claiming her for his wife. She wasted many hours trying thus to reassure herself.

They passed the winter at Ventnor, but May entreated her uncle and aunt to consider Rawlstone their home for the present, and there they all returned in spring. Then the time came when the Evanshaws were to leave Murchison Square, and Dr. Theodore would not hear of their having the house another year.

"No; I have been turned out of my own house long enough," he said; "and they shall go." And they went.

"I am to have my house again," Dr. Theodore said, rejoicingly, as he dined with his brother in Creswick Gardens. "Those Evanshaw people go out of it next week. Nothing shall ever induce me to let it again."

"Why not?" asked John. "They have not hurt anything, and have paid you handsomely for it. What would you have?"

"Why, I wanted to refer to some of my specimens, and I could not. I have been completely stopped in the investigations upon the relative size of the skulls in the Southern Counties, and in the barrows of Yorkshire, for the thickheaded idiots have nailed up the cupboard in which I left the specimens, and put a great looking-glass before it."

"Horrible idea!" said John, with some disgust. "But I am glad to have you in town again."

Dr. Halton brought all his family to town,

intent on introducing his daughters to all the most learned societies in London. But though Margaret and Florence were grateful for his kindness, he was grieved to see Gertrude prefer the company of her Aunt John, who took her out in a continual round of gaiety which disgusted poor Dr. Theodore.

"A frivolous, heartless, fashionable woman ; a mere butterfly, an idle waster of life," he moralised. "I wish she had never cared a straw for my poor girl ! She will spoil her for life. Heartless !"

Mrs. John Halton did not deserve this accusation. It might be considered as a sign of a kind heart, that she had been so ready to take charge of her nieces, and introduce them to the world. It was Margaret whom she most wished to have, as being the richest, and therefore probably the most creditable to her ; but she very generously took Gertrude when May declined her invitation. However, one day, a brother of her own returned from the colonies, bringing with him three daughters, and one of these, Annabella Weston, became her aunt's favourite protégée,

and she ceased to wish for Miss Cressingham. She did not, nevertheless, neglect Gertrude; nor would she consent that she should leave her, when Dr. Theodore's family returned to Rawlstone in June. She said, it was absurd for a girl who liked society, to go and bury herself in the country, in the very middle of the London season, and Gertrude should stay with her; and she insisted till she gained her point.

Whether Mrs. John was actuated entirely by pure benevolence towards Gertrude, or whether she was aware that, as long as she was in her house, Edward Halton was necessarily a constant visitor to it, and that Gertrude was Annabella's constant companion, cannot be strictly determined. Very few good actions spring from unmixed motives, and Aunt John was as fond of a little match-making as most of her sex, and had her own views for Edward, who she knew would be her husband's heir. If she did form plans for him, she had some right to do so; for during the long absences of his father and mother, he had been either her constant guest, or an

established inmate of her house ; and she had done her best, in her own way, to supply the place of a mother to him. Nature had given Mrs. John a warm heart, and she would have been perfectly happy with two or three sons or daughters of her own ; but Fate, having regard more to Mr. Halton's happiness than hers, had wisely decreed her none, and she did without very well. But now she had Annabella.

When Aunt Alice talked of going again to Ventnor for the winter, May again refused to go to London, and proposed that a widow lady she had met at Ventnor, should be invited to come and reside at Rawlstone with her ; and as May now never proposed anything without intending to carry it through, the question was soon decided. Aunt John was much distressed, and wrote to point out the disadvantages of taking a companion who was neither stylish or well connected, whom nobody knew, and who could not introduce Miss Cressingham into any good society. She pledged herself to find a lady, the daughter of a clergyman, and widow of an officer,

whose name would be a passport in any society, and who could bring Margaret many pleasant acquaintances, "instead of this old dowdy thing, whom no one has ever heard of. Such a companion will really undo half the advantages of Margaret's position in the county."

Margaret read Mrs. John's letter, and admitted the truth of its arguments; but observed that the first duty of the rich was to make life pleasanter to those who were poor; and that Mrs. Thompson had suffered great sorrow and privation since her widowhood, and would peculiarly appreciate the comforts of a home like Rawlstone.

"Very likely," said Gertrude; "but if you make a duty to yourself of sharing the comforts of Rawlstone with all who may be poor and unhappy, you will make yourself a martyr to vulgar, and ignorant, and horrid people."

"I should not consider it my duty to take her if she were vulgar and horrid," said May, "or if she were incompetent for the position of a companion. I do not suppose we ought to carry out the principle as far as that,—at

least as a general rule. We pay for good work, not for bad ; but she is a lady, and there is no reason why I should prefer any one else to her, except that she has, as you say, no grand connections, and cannot talk to me of them."

"Well, I suppose you are right ; at least papa will say so. So it's no use talking," said Gertrude. "And I suppose the cold wind here won't kill the old lady, who has been living so long in Ventnor ;" and with this parting shot, Gertrude went off to find a luxurious couch on a bed of heather, canopied by the tall beeches, and read her novel in ease.

May soon arranged matters with Mrs. Thompson ; and when the poor widow was domiciled at Rawlstone, Aunt Alice took Florence, and went again to Ventnor ; but Gertrude went to Murchison Square, and kept house for Edward and her father. Dr. Theodore, however, divided his time pretty equally between the three resting-places of his family. He travelled backwards and forwards very cheerfully, often remarking that he gathered many ideas concerning the geological forma-

tion of the country, by observing the sides of the railway cuttings through which he passed. His enthusiasm for science nearly cost him a serious illness on one occasion, when, his train having come to a sudden and mysterious standstill in a deep cutting, he could not refrain from climbing out to examine the chalk rock through which he was passing, and the train getting into motion again, he was left upon this highly interesting formation, in a cold January evening, with a chill wind blowing sharply, and where, being afraid to venture away from the railway, amidst the snow and darkness, he had to follow the course of the line for nearly twelve miles, over broken country, with icicles hanging to his beard, and his feet so benumbed as barely to serve him in walking. This exploit, however, gained him considerable credit among the members of the Mineralogical Society, who gloried in him as a possible martyr to science.

Gertrude remained in London while her father paid his visits to Rawlstone. May often begged her to accompany him, but

Gertrude replied, she did not like to leave Edward alone ; and as Margaret made no rejoinder to this, or hinted she would like him to come also, Gerty refused to go. However, the spring brought her mother and Florence to Murchison Square, and May also came for a few weeks ; but then, tired of the picture galleries and flower-shows, went home to her wild seashore. She had found a good boatman among the fishermen, and she tried to find pleasure in her old pastime again.

It was not in calm weather, when the water washed lazily on the beach beneath the summer sun, that she chose to amuse herself by rowing up and down ; but in the winter, when the sea yet heaved with the storm of yesterday, and when the fishermen looked at the clouds and said to each other, " It will be an ugly night," her little boat was seen, like one of Mother Carey's chickens, holding its way across the grey rollers, disappearing in a hollow and rising on another wave, resolved on staying out as long as the daylight lasted, whether the wind blew or not. Dr. Theodore

forbade this amusement, and when he was there May never asked for the boat unless there was no wind stirring ; but when he was safe in London, the fishermen saw her come down on the beach, wrapped in her dark blue waterproof, and asking the old question, " Will it do for an hour, Robin ? Will it hold off ? " The old sailor looked up at the sky, and generally nodded, and two strong boatmen ran to get the little boat off ; while the old butler, who had constituted himself her guardian in Dr. Theodore's absence, and always followed her down to the shore, turned into Robin's cottage, and taking the *Times* from his pocket, sat down to wait for her return.

With the exception of these hours wasted in the boat, the young châtelaine of Rawlstone led a busy life. Mr. White had the sense to see that his only chance of satisfying his lady, was by initiating her into all the details of his work ; and every morning he came to lay the question of the day before her, and ask her orders, or give his advice, as best suited him ; till May, growing more awake to her own ignorance, and perplexed with various difficulties he

raised, was obliged to let him have his own way, and even asked for lessons from him as to what should be done. She had fully intended to follow out her uncle's idea, and rid herself of Mr. White; and Edward's remonstrances, which were reported to her, only served to strengthen her in her resolution; but when she learned that he had been appointed bailiff by her father, she determined as resolutely to keep him. She told Dr. Theodore that, ignorant as the good man was of every modern theory of agriculture, he was well acquainted with the soil and the stupid labourers who had to till it; and until she could learn to look after the farm herself, she would feel more easy if he remained. Dr. Theodore had long recognised the hopeless obstinacy of his amiable niece, and gave up the point, and May asked Mr. White to instruct her in his profession.

Mr. White, profoundly impressed with the belief that the science of farming was, as he said, beyond the comprehension of a female, at first tried to content her with general remarks and occasional explanations; but May

was not to be baffled. She sent for all the last books on farming, studied them diligently, and passed many hours in the fields, watching the work, and taking mental notes of what she saw, till at last, White, seeing that his young mistress was about to become a farmer despite of him, and shocked beyond measure at the idea that Rawlstone Hall Farm should be cultivated on the new principles, turned round, and undertook her education himself in real earnest, sparing no pains to instil orthodox and conservative views of agriculture into her wavering mind. Before three harvests had been gathered in, Margaret and the bailiff worked in the completest harmony.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE YEARS PASS ON.

THE market-place at Yarmouth is a busy scene at certain hours of the day, and Dr. Theodore found it an amusing occupation to walk about it, and study human character and appearance, while his wife and niece were making purchases at the best shops there. If they gave him time, he plunged adventurously down one of the narrow lanes which are considered streets in that region, and which rival the dim alleys of old Genoa in gloom and economy of space. The walls leaning towards each other, and only kept from falling together, by crossway beams at intervals, showed him a narrow crack of blue sky high above his head ; and the good housewives, sweeping the dust out at their doors, bespattered him with bits of paper and white threads ; but he went on in perfect contentment. At any rate the dark alley was cooler than the open market-place, where the sun was reflected back from the

white stones, and the foot passengers were fain to creep along close to the houses, in search of a little shade from the roofs.

On one of the hottest days of June, however, Margaret preferred to sit in the barouche, and wait for her aunt, rather than go, she said, into the close air of a linen draper's shop. This was her excuse ; but the truth was, she wanted to be alone. On the way to Yarmouth, they had met a gentleman whom she knew to be the son of the old clergyman who had married her to Jesse ; and the sight of him and the sound of his name had excited her painfully. The old clergyman was long since dead, or she would have gone to him for advice, or rather sympathy, for advice he could not give her. All the counsel she needed, she received from Mr. Quillett, but he could only tell her that patience was her only help. No proof of Jesse's death or news of his being alive could be obtained. Inquiries had been set afoot in Sandmouth, in Enderby, and in Yarmouth, but nothing could be learned ; and Mr. Quillett admitted that Josiah was more likely to hear of him than any one else would be.

He was probably dead, but there was no proving it.

"But meantime, can I sell the farm at Enderby?" said Margaret. "I cannot live there. I cannot find a good tenant for it. It is a continual drain on my income; and if I sold it I should buy the hill-farm here, close to Rawlstone. I have set my mind on selling it, and yet I think from what you tell me, I cannot."

"No; certainly you cannot. You could not effect a legal sale of it without his consent, and it would be very unfair to allow any one to buy it in ignorance of your inability to sell it. You must wait, my dear lady."

"Till when?" asked Margaret, setting her teeth in vexation, and perhaps to hide deeper emotion.

"Ah, till we have proof that you are free to do as you like. We hear nothing of him, so we may suppose he is dead; and if you will be guided by me, you will not set any more active inquiries on foot; because, if he be alive, his not coming back would seem to imply that he is doubtful if he is legally married to you or not,

or that he still thinks your uncle could institute proceedings against him for that forgery. And if he were to hear you were making inquiries about him, he might infer, naturally, I should say, that you either wanted him back, or were afraid of him. In either case we should hear of him sooner than we wished. No, no; it is a good proverb 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' We don't want him, and therefore it is unwise to ask after him. I think myself the chances are all in favour of his being dead, and that you may feel perfectly easy on that point."

"But I want, if it is so, to know it," said Margaret, sadly. "I would rather know he were alive, than bear this uncertainty."

"But would it help you to know he was alive?" asked Mr. Quillett, mildly. "On the contrary, it would make you more unhappy than ever. Now you can hope you are safe, and may remain so; but in that case you would have to dread the discovery of your marriage, and even his returning to prove it. And I am not wrong in supposing you would dread that, am I?"

"Oh no, indeed. I would rather die than

that he should claim me as his wife, if he be what I fear he is now."

"You think he would drink? To me the question is, how he could get out of that *Astoria* business without being at least accessory to the death of the captain. But we ought to suppose the best, and give him the benefit of the doubt. And my own belief is, my dear young lady, he is dead." So Mr. Quillett tried to comfort Margaret, but he did not always succeed; and when she had not seen him for some time, her fears returned, and harassed her sleeping and waking, if she were not mentally occupied with some all-engrossing subject foreign to herself.

On this particular June day, she was more than usually sad, and the effort to hide it from Aunt Alice had tired her out. So she was glad to be alone, and sat in the open carriage in the glare of the sun, shading herself as best she could with her parasol, while her aunt was making her purchases.

The market-place presented a varied as well as a busy appearance. First, a carriage drove up, and three ladies, representing one

of the highest families in the county, came out of the stationer's shop, and, exchanging bows and smiles with Miss Cressingham, took their seats, and drove away. Then two old-fashioned English squires came hurrying along, in pursuit of a shrewd-looking cornfactor, with whom they wanted a few words. And then two of the mild-featured, well-grown women of the lower class, shabbily dressed as to their gowns, but neat and trim in the foot gear and closely-braided hair, walked quietly by, basket on arm. Then some Dutch sailors wandered in from the harbour, and a group of Londoners, very gay and very vulgar, commented on the unsophisticated country-folks in their rapid short accents, carefully purified from any provincial drawl or any clear vowel sounds either.

Then two jolly, rough English tars went rollicking along the pavement, and the serious quiet fishermen of the place, in their Jersey shirts, came and exchanged a few words with them. The lady population of Yarmouth, meantime thronged the windows of the shops; and boys, fish-girls, fruit-women, beggars, and

idlers, filled up the space in front of May's carriage, listening to the inspiring strains of the Marseillaise, played by an Italian organ-grinder, strayed down from London.

A young woman, poor in dress, but yet unquestionably a lady, who led a child by the hand, stopped as she came to this little crowd, and the boy commented on the music in the clear tones which the children of the well-to-do learn early. The poor woman's child has a different cry from its richer neighbour; it does not scream to make its wants and wrongs known, in the certainty of redress, but merely because it cannot help it. Possibly some such philosophy gives rise to the difference of the tones in which the rich and poor speak. Margaret noticed the child's voice, and then his mother's, and the last made her start and look at her, expecting to find some old acquaintance. She could not remember to have seen her, but she knew the voice was familiar, and as she gazed at the pale and careworn face, she felt sure she had seen that before. She rose, and said to the coachman,—

“Drive on, and keep close to that lady ;

the one in the shawl," she added, pointing out the article of dress, which, so unsuited to the season, and evidently worn only because the owner possessed no lighter or cooler covering for her shoulders, seemed at once to distinguish the stranger.

Margaret's servants were used to receive apparently capricious orders, and the coachman quickly touched up his sleepy horses with a judicious flick of the whip, and guided them slowly along by the pavement, keeping beside the object of his lady's curiosity.

Margaret watched the stranger intently for some two minutes, before it flashed upon her mind that this sad, haggard, careworn woman was her friend Clara Hathaway.

"Clara!" she cried; and she had opened the door, and was out on the path before the coachman had time to pull up, or even knew he was to do so. "It is you, Clara. Don't you know me,—Margaret,—Margaret Cressingham? You must remember," she said, taking her friend's hand. "I can't be wrong; it is you."

A look of joy brightened the poor wanderer's features.

"Oh, dear! Is it you, Margaret? I am so glad I have found you. I have had such trouble."

"Get into the carriage, and tell me about it. You look too tired to walk a step further," said May. But Clara shook her head, and signed that she would rather Miss Cressingham walked on with her; and Margaret told the coachman to drive back for her aunt.

"My husband has left me," said Clara. "He went two years ago; that is,—Margaret, I will tell you the truth. He grew so violent I could not stay with him; my life was not safe nor the child's either. I left him, and have hidden from him, for he tried to find me. I call myself Durrand now; but I fear every day he will find me out. I take in needlework, and I teach, when I can, little girls,—the tradespeople's children."

"Would you not go back to him?"

"Never! You don't know what he is; you don't know what I have suffered. Oh, it was terrible! My life has been in danger many times; and he was not kind when he

was sober. No; I could never go back to him. And he has no house to offer me either. He was ruined, and there is nothing left,—nothing for this poor child.”

“Never mind that, Clara. I can take care of you. Where do you live?”

“At Black’s, the confectioner’s, in Regent Street. I have a room there; but you,—are you serious?”

“I should think I was. From this time I will take care of you. I shall send for you to come over and see my uncle and aunt to-morrow. I shall transport you to Rawlstone for good, if you will come. Don’t thank me; you don’t know what hard work I have in store for you. I am going to adopt six children, and educate them, and you will have to teach them. There is the carriage coming. Good-bye. Stop! there is my purse. I don’t know if there is much in it; but I will come for you to-morrow. It may be of use to you. I wish it were to me.”

May had invented the six children in a pure flight of genius, on the exigency of the moment; but she knew that if she were to offer

Clara the means of maintenance, she must spare her pride by giving her something to do. So she began to think over the measure to which she had pledged herself. For the present, however, she found it easy to make Clara a guest at Rawlstone, and give her a handsome subsidy, assuring her she should demand work of her sooner or later ; and with this in mind, she began to inquire into the management of schools, and took her uncle into council on the subject.

"It is no use trying to elevate the children of the poor while they remain in their own wretched homes, where all about them is brutalising, and undoes your work," she moralised. "The only way will be to bring them into your own house among the refinements of educated people."

"I think you would do more good by giving a little education to all the poor of the village," said her uncle ; "they are in a shockingly neglected state. A few easy lectures on natural philosophy and elementary science would open their minds. I will give them one or two."

But Dr. Theodore never got further than writing the heads of his lectures. He had too much to do ; for the rocks at Rawlstone proved to be full of fossils, and the neighbouring country was a splendid field for investigation of the tertiary and post-diluvial formations. He made many interesting discoveries, and nearly lost his life going down an old well in pursuit of the truth which was presumed to be buried at the bottom. Although he was physically lazy in inverse proportion to his intellectual activity, he bravely adventured himself in a basket at the end of a long rope, and was swung up and down in this almost unfathomable shaft ; after all the foul air, which on the first occasion had nearly smothered him, had been dispelled. Margaret and Florence were compelled to yield to his entreaties, and descend also into this abyss, and make their observations on the character of rocks through which the shaft had been sunk. May's discovery that it communicated by a passage with a cave on the seashore, and therefore had some claims to be considered a work of ancient fortification, was regarded as trivial

and uninteresting by him, in comparison with the glorious facilities it afforded of counting the different strata that it laid open to view. He would have made every man, woman, and child, in the village descend into the awful depths if he had had the power, and May nearly cried with laughing when she saw Mr. White forced to accompany her uncle into the geologic heaven.

Mr. White's disgust at these proceedings came to a climax, when Dr. Halton set a dozen men to work to excavate a small hillock in one of the cornfields; indifferent alike to the corn destroyed, and the damage done to the soil, by the passage of heavy carts of earth over it. Mr. White remonstrated with Margaret, and at first not without hope of success; for she was as much annoyed as himself. But when the bailiff hoped she would move in the matter, he was doomed to be disappointed.

"If my uncle wishes it, the work must go on; I will not have a word said," was her ultimatum. And Mr. White swore in his heart a deep and lasting enmity to the

scientific enthusiast who troubled his peace and trampled his barley.

Dr. Halton thought that in regaining possession of his home in Murchison Square, he had secured himself a safe retreat from the follies of the unscientific world, in which to pursue his studies unmolested; but he was mistaken. He could surround himself, indeed, with some of the best and wisest men of the day, but he could not drive from his house some of the most foolish young people of the period, who made themselves at home in his drawing-room, and disturbed his grave friends in the library by their laughter and singing overhead. He had thought himself happy to get the Evanshaws out of his house; but young Robert Evanshaw had returned, and finding it swept and garnished, had brought companions innumerable, like unto himself, into it.

"The most conceited and ignorant booby I ever met in all my life," said Dr. Halton, growing more and more irritated, as he saw that his wife could tolerate Mr. Evanshaw, and Edward had a marked liking for him.

"I wish he would get as tired of us all, as I am of him. I would do anything in the world to get rid of him."

"He won't go, sir; unless you let him take away what he has come for, with him," said Edward drily.

"Does he want anything I can give him? I am sure he is welcome. What can I do for him?" said Dr. Theodore, eagerly; while Edward enjoyed seeing his utter unconsciousness.

"Let him take Gerty away when he goes. He will never go till he has her," he answered. "That is what he comes for."

It was a terrible shock to Dr. Halton, when he understood the danger that threatened his household; but he refused at first to believe that any daughter of his could be so foolish as to reciprocate Mr. Evanshaw's sentiments.

"The man is an addle-pated, foolish idiot," he said, and his contempt for him was only equalled by his dislike. If he could feel an animus against any living creature in the world, it was for Robert Evanshaw; and it was

some time before he would hear any argument in his favour. He gave way at last, however; and having once given his consent to the engagement, was too kind-hearted ever to distress his daughter by any criticism of her lover. And after Gertrude had been married six months, he became reconciled to the sight of Robert, and only when alone with Margaret, and sometimes with Edward, wondered at Gerty's folly in choosing "such an empty-pated idiot."

After Gertrude was married, Dr. and Mrs. Halton paid much shorter visits to Rawlstone, because Edward was left behind, eating his breakfasts in solitary grandeur in Murchison Square, and spending his evenings with Aunt Anne, and her niece Annabella. He was never invited to Rawlstone; and when he occasionally ventured down there to escort Florence, he was received too coldly by the mistress of the house to care to prolong his stay. His mother pitied his loneliness, and at last she refused to go to Ventnor at the approach of winter, preferring to confine herself a prisoner to the house all the winter, to being

parted from him for six months. Gertrude therefore had the pleasure of seeing her parents settled near her, and Margaret was left alone with Mrs. Thompson and Clara Hathaway. She preferred this. It was easier to her to bear her suspense and fears, when all those around her had no suspicion that she was suffering. Mr. Quillett came down sometimes to advise her as to her affairs. He was very much pleased to see she was building a new farmstead.

"That is right. Spend all you can upon the land," said he. "Your husband cannot leave that away from you when he dies."

"He could not take the land from me if he came back, could he?" Margaret asked, trying to quiet her own apprehensions on that head.

"Well, no; he could not in one way; but I told you he was the tenant for your joint lives. So he can live here if he chooses, or put some one else here, and tell you to go where he thinks best. But it is almost certain that, if he is not dead, he believes himself to have no claim upon you; so you

are safe I think. Only we must not let Mr. Edward Halton excite his suspicions (if he be alive) by making inquiries. May I tell him you wish none to be made? And let me advise you to put this if possible from your mind. Thinking over it can do no good. Try and interest yourself in other things. The schools for instance."

But Margaret found it difficult to interest herself even in these, when she remembered she might have to leave Rawlstone, or see a stranger in possession there.

Still, the schools did occupy much of her thoughts. If her uncle had his hobby, she had hers likewise, and it was educating the poor; and she followed her hobby as fiercely as he did his. She visited the village school, and projected reforms with all the indiscreet zeal of a new convert, and soon was at odds with both the schoolmistress and the curate.

"The children," she complained to the latter, when he came to make peace between her and the offended school-dame, "go into the school capable of being taught, but they leave it idiots. They not only learn nothing, but

lose the power of learning, and hate the sight of a book for ever. The girls spend half their time in needlework, and yet cannot make a cotton gown ; and the boys are writing like clerks, while they can't read aloud."

To which Dr. Halton added,—

"The evils of this form of education are widespread, and will strike their roots deep. The utter ignorance of the first principles of natural science which should be taught to every child, cannot fail to engender evil, moral and physical. It would be much more expedient to give the young mind an idea of the sublime mysteries of nature, than to addle their brains with the history of the Tudors and Plantagenets, and the wars of the Greeks and Persians. My dear sir, the mere physical injury which is entailed by passing so many hours a day in the vitiated atmosphere of that schoolroom is to be deprecated, and should be remedied. A good system of ventilation is one of the first requisites in the construction of schools, and I should like to show you some diagrams of a method I have suggested to the Council

of the Mineralogical Society for the ventilation of their lecture-room."

The result of Margaret's interference and Dr. Theodore's harangue was, that they were politely informed that the presence of visitors hindered the children in their studies, and found the doors of the school-house closed against them. Nothing daunted, Margaret appealed to Clara, and with her assistance she began a school on her own plan among the children of her own labourers, being much encouraged thereto by the sympathy of some of her neighbours, who remonstrated with the curate for his incivility to Miss Cressingham.

At this time May was popular among her neighbours; she had won their good opinion by refusing to quarrel with White, when her uncle was bent on putting another man in his place, and she was even praised for her forbearance with Dr. Halton's archæological researches among her barley-fields, when it was known, through Mr. White, that she was as much annoyed as himself about them, and only gave way out of respect to her

uncle. The members of the Mineralogical Society who came to visit Rawlstone, were agreeable men, although considered eccentric by the gentlemen whom Dr. Halton invited to meet them at dinner; and as Margaret, when her aunt was with her, indemnified herself for the seclusion in which she lived when alone with Mrs. Thompson and Clara, by making all the neighbours welcome, she enjoyed the goodwill and approbation of all the country round.

But it was otherwise when Margaret, led astray by her own perverse nature, and the still more pernicious teachings of Dr. Theodore, began to talk of the responsibilities of landholders, and ask why the cottages were pulled down, and the labourers compelled to live at a distance from the farms where they had their daily work. The neighbouring farmers shook their heads, the gentlemen proprietors talked of Dr. Theodore as a Radical and a mischief-maker, and Sir Henry Churchill, of Churchill Park, came himself, and in right of a remote cousinship, remonstrated civilly, but firmly, with the young lady

who so wilfully set public opinion and the public good at defiance.

But remonstrance was of no good, for the lady's head was hopelessly turned, and she maintained that her labourers should have comfortable dwellings on her own land, and that she would build as many cottages as were wanted; and the poor should no longer crowd themselves into hovels, which destroyed all self-respect and hope of their future moral elevation. May was soon deep in estimates of brick and mortar, and from that time her troubles began. There was no longer any chance of her being allowed to patronise the schools: she was held a heretic, and her protégés were marked men, and were continually pounced on for trespass or violation of the game laws. Visits of ceremony were still exchanged between her and her neighbours; but all conversation generally ended in remonstrance, or at least argument of no pleasant kind.

"I am afraid I have driven Sir Henry Churchill away, and I am sorry," she said to Clara. "I wish I had not had to offend him.

However, I don't care, provided Mrs. Henderson holds firm to me. I should be very grieved to lose her. I don't care about all the rest."

But she did care, and disliked being thwarted and found fault with immensely. She liked popularity, and would have done much to retain it; but she would not give up the labourers' cottages. The poor should not be driven from the parish where their work lay, to keep the poor-rate down to the limit decreed by Sir Henry Churchill's friends. To do Sir Henry justice, he was generous towards his own tenants and people, and built cottages where they required them; but he objected to May's principle that the poor had rights which landlords were bound to respect. and still more to having the subject talked about; so that though he did not entirely dissent from his fair neighbour's views, he deprecated most strongly her indiscretion in proclaiming them.

It was perhaps owing to Clara's constant presence at Rawlstone that May began to take a different view of Freeman's disappear-

ance to Mr. Quillett. She no longer thought he was dead, or in prison for piracy. To her mind, the more simple theory of intemperance explained his silence. She could not believe any longer that he was dead, for Josiah had dropped a hint as to his having been heard of in America; but she dwelt with horror on the idea that he had yielded to the temptation of drink, and had forgotten both her and her money in intoxication. If he would continue so to forget her, it would be well; but he might at any time remember her, and make his way back to claim her. And if he came, what would be her fate? It was horrible to think of, and yet she could not escape from the thought, for Clara was always seeking sympathy from her for her own sorrows, and detailing the scenes of intemperance and brutality through which she had passed, till her listener was fairly heartsick with terror.

And at last her terrors and fears were confirmed, for a letter came from Josiah to say his brother was living.

Josiah himself was writing from his death

bed, and said it was now a matter of conscience with him to let Mr. Halton know his brother was still alive, although, whereabouts in America he was, he did not himself know. He had seen him, and often had had letters from him, but he had not told him where he lived or how. He fancied he was among the gold fields; but he had lately met with a paragraph in a newspaper that had alarmed him, and he enclosed it for Mr. Halton's perusal. He was dying himself, and his wife and two of his children were dead, and he begged Mr. Halton to show some kindness to his other children.

The letter was enclosed in an envelope by his son, Gerald Freeman, who stated that his father was dead; but so far from asking any favours of Mr. Halton, Gerald announced his wish to have no further communication with him upon any subject whatever, and bitterly accused John Halton of having ruined his family and destroyed his parents. The letter was that of an angry and reckless man, and it was evident they would hear no more from Gerald.

But the cutting from the newspaper contained more information. Edward saw Jesse Freeman's name in it,—and coupled with murder!

The paragraph detailed the circumstances of a drunken fight in a tavern, in which Jesse Freeman, who was described as an English sailor, had killed one man, and wounded another in the attempt to escape. But whether he was captured or not was untold, for the cutting appeared, to be taken from some temperance newspaper, which was more concerned with the frightful responsibility of those who sold intoxicating drinks to the poor, than with the murdered man or the murderer. Both were alike spoken of as the wretched victims of intoxication, but it was not stated if the guilty Englishman were arrested or not. Neither did the piece of newspaper afford any clue to the time when the crime was committed. It was alluded to as being of late occurrence when the journal was printed; but the date of the journal itself was torn off, and the reverse side of the paper only contained advertisements, with no reference to the date of its publication.

"It may have been three months ago, or three years," said Edward. "He is perhaps in jail somewhere or other. God grant he may die there!"

Dr. Theodore took the news to Margaret, and was shocked to find how much she was prepared to credit them.

"I thought it would end so," she said faintly. "Perhaps he is in prison now."

But when her uncle was gone, she sent for Mr. Quillett, and showed him the piece of newspaper.

"There is no date to it, but it is three years old. Look at this advertisement of a Scotch preacher, lecturing on drunkenness, in Cincinnati. One of my servants knows his name. He is in England now: I have written to him, and asked when it was he was in Cincinnati and lectured there; and here is his answer. You see it is three years ago."

"Then it is three years since this murder, or rather homicide, we may call it, was committed," said Mr. Quillett. "Well then we may consider he is in prison now, or dead perhaps."

"Dead perhaps," sighed May. "That would be better than thinking he was in a jail. You can go and tell Mr. Halton that you have ascertained this paper is three years old. You need not say I found it out. Poor fellow! a jail would soon kill him. Could nothing be done for him, without his suspecting who was helping him?"

"I do not see how," replied Mr. Quillett. "In the first place you have no clue as to where he is; and if you had, I should most earnestly advise you not to make inquiries. It is evident to me, that he does not suppose his marriage to you was a legal one, or he would long since have come forward to reap the benefit of it. Your uncle managed much better than he knew, in raising that doubt about its legality. Mr. Freeman thinks he has no claim on you, and has therefore stayed away. If you make inquiries about him, and he hears of it, he will naturally suppose that you have an interest in him, or are afraid of him, and he will return if he can. Anyhow, he will trouble you, for though he may be kept in prison for some years, he

could still make it, by making known to the world that you are his wife; and it would only make it worse for you that he was a convict. And there is no saying if he would not be able to get his sentence commuted, or escape from jail, if it were known he were a rich man. Justice can generally be bought in America. It is not as it is here," added the English lawyer, forgetting that in perhaps half the States of the American Union, the laws would have protected his client from the danger that now hung over her, and have granted her a release from the tie that held her the unwilling wife of a convict as soon as he should regain his liberty.

Mr. Quillett obtained Margaret's assent to his imposing in her name a positive prohibition on Edward's making inquiries far and wide among American towns and prisons. He said he would himself do all that was needful for her true interests. Meantime he went one day to Glasgow, and saw the reverend Scotch lecturer there, and asked him if he remembered hearing during his stay at Cincinnati any story of a drunken

quarrel ending in murder, that had occurred within a few weeks of his arrival there. The reverend lecturer thought for a few moments, and replied that he did recollect some such occurrence, and fancied that an English sailor killed some one of his companions; but he neither remembered the name, nor whether the homicide was arrested. Mr. Quillett did not think it necessary to take his confirmation of bad news to Margaret. He thought she was anxious enough already.

She was making a virtue of philosophy and of patience, and trying to interest herself in her school.

It was fortunate for her that Clara left her for a time to go and nurse a sick relative, for her companionship prevented her ever losing sight of her own danger, however busy she might be with the details of her daily life. When she was away from Mrs. Hathaway, she could forget Freeman in her worry about the school, and a quarrel with the neighbouring magistrates about a boy who was caught stealing apples; but whenever she looked at Clara, and saw on

her forehead the deep scar that she had received one day when her husband was mad with drink, and heard her continually telling the sad recital of the ill usage she had suffered, her own heart sank with dread, and she prayed wildly that she might be dead before Freeman got out of prison.

And yet it was a grief to her to know he was in jail; she would fain have thought he was happy and contented. She wished she could send him money. Half of what she had should have been his, and welcome, if she could have ensured his keeping away. But Mr. Quillett said it would be dangerous to try and effect such a compromise. "He has a right to the whole if he has a right to any," he observed; "and it is a happy thing for you he does not know he has that right. I hope he may marry some one in America, and then there is less chance of his coming here when he gets out of prison. The worst of it is, that he will have had time to think while he is in jail, and perhaps tell his history to some one cleverer than himself, and so may know what his real rights are when

he comes out. I wonder how long he was sentenced for!"

* * * * *

"There is one comfort," Edward said to Uncle John, a year afterwards. "Freeman seems to be safe for the present, and perhaps he will stop in prison till he dies. Manslaughter, murder, and resistance to the police: I should think he was well in for twenty-one years, especially if they find he has been among pirates. I think Margaret may be quite safe."

"He has been in prison four years now," said Mr. Halton. "I wonder if he will be in much longer. That rascal, Josiah Freeman, deceived us, then. He must have known his brother was alive before now."

"He may have been in prison before this committal," said Edward, as a new idea gleamed on him. "Perhaps he got into trouble after the affair of the *Astoria*, and that would account for Josiah's silence respecting it. You know he never gave us a hint of it till more than two years after, when we heard of it from Robert, and wrote to

him. This young rascal, his son, seems resolved not to answer our letters. I have one returned from the Dead Letter Office."

As time went on, year by year, and brought no news of Freeman, Margaret, reflecting on Mr. Quillett's advice, saw that it was unwise to indulge her anxiety. The worst might never come to pass, and all her agitating doubts would not bring the question to a speedier conclusion, and would only wear out her own life uselessly. He might be dead; he might be ignorant of his rights over her; and all might end well. She tried to practise philosophy, and to banish her fears and apprehensions from her mind by renewed attention to the concerns of her farm and her tenants. For a time she had almost ceased to care for them, or rather she dreaded to interest herself more in the home which might be some day taken from her. A shadow seemed to hang over the very house itself, when she remembered she might have to leave it, and take refuge with her uncle.

If Freeman came back sobered by his imprisonment and ready to hear reason, it

might be possible to convince him that he would do wisely to take Enderby Grange and all his wife's money, and leave her in quiet possession of Rawlstone. In that case, she would lease the land to a farmer, and with the small income so raised, live as she might in the old house that had been so dear to her and to her parents. She cared less for all her other property than for this old grey house, where she remembered her father, and where her mother had moved about, bright and beautiful, unlike the pale, dull invalid who had faded away in silence at Sandmouth. If she might still live at Rawlstone, she felt she could be yet grateful to Heaven. But if Freeman came back the unreasoning, drunken savage he was reported to be, he might be unable to comprehend that his real interest would be better served by accepting this offer; and following some blind, blundering idea of defiance to Mr. Halton, insist on claiming his wife; and she shuddered at the thought that she might receive no warning of his coming until he appeared at Rawlstone itself. Then

she might have to go through scenes as dreadful as Clara had described, or even worse; for John Hathaway had once been a gentleman and a man of education, and unless under the utter madness of drunkenness, would never have struck or ill-used any person weaker than himself, much less a woman. What Freeman might do was only to be guessed at; but it might be well if she succeeded in leaving the house, and reaching her uncle's in safety. As to how much protection she would gain by an appeal to the law, she was not sure; but she had friends, and they would do their best to help her. And it could not be, that young, beautiful, and well born as she was, she would be left to the mercies of a drunken, illiterate sailor, convicted of crimes of violence, and just released from jail. On that head she felt no fear. She was morally certain she would never be left unprotected by the law. It was fortunate for her that his crimes had been of so dark a hue, as that might prove her help in an appeal to the humanity of English law. But in the invoking the pity of the world, and seeking protection from the

man she had once loved and married, lay a humiliation so great that she doubted whether she would not rather submit to her fate in silence. And sometimes she told herself that sooner than have her story dragged through all the courts and all the newspapers, it would be better to receive him back as her master, or rather the master of Rawlstone, and die heart-broken in silence.

"There's something on her mind, and there has been these many years. I can't make it out;" said the old fisherman to his son, who was one of the boatmen in regular attendance on Miss Cressingham. "I should not be surprised if some day she got that boat off without you, and never come back. She looks at the water sometimes as though she wished she was well under it; and Mary says that when John Carter's Kitty died, and she went down to see her, she said to her, as she put the flowers into the coffin she wished she were in it instead of she. What's she got to bother her? Has not she got money more than she wants, and friends too? It can't be right, that a handsome young lass,

like she, should want to be lying there with poor Kitty Carter."

"Well, if it's anything amiss, I hope the Lord will help her, as He has done many of us," said another old man, fervently. "She is the poor man's friend, she is, and better for us than all the gentlemen round."

"Ay, and they hate her for taking our part. Did not Sir Henry Churchill send George Fisher to prison for trespassing in his park, just because she wrote to him, and tried to beg him off?"

"He did not send him to prison though, he fined him, and she paid it, I know; but Sir Henry would have sent him to jail if he could, just because she's stood by him. God bless her!"

Honest Robin's warmth in behalf of Miss Cressingham somewhat prejudiced his judgment as regarded Sir Henry Churchill's conduct in the matter of George Fisher; for Fisher had not only been clearly in fault, but had made himself sufficiently obnoxious to the neighbouring gentlemen to merit particular severity, without Miss Cressingham's having

espoused his cause. He was a Yarmouth man, and had been in America, and he professed to consider the game laws tyrannical, and the preservers of game, tyrants; and he talked of the improved condition of the working man in America, so that the county magistrates looked with an unfavourable eye upon him; and when he was found guilty of an act of trespass, not without suspicion of poaching, it was not singular that he should be judged harshly. May, whose ear he had succeeded in gaining, espoused his cause, and her letter to Sir Henry Churchill caused that magistrate to give the culprit the privilege of paying a fine instead of going to prison, knowing well that the fine would be paid by Miss Cressingham, who, to Sir Henry's great disapprobation, took so lively an interest in this plausible rascal, merely because he was a dangerous radical, and deserved to be transported.

CHAPTER IX.

AN OLD FRIEND AND A NEW LOVE.

TIME went on. It was one bright January morning, nearly six years after they had returned to England, that Florence and her father were in the library at Murchison Square, vainly trying to make room on the wall for a large map of the Rawlstone farm geologically considered, and for a flat case of fossils there collected, when Edward came in, evidently in a hurry.

"Why, I thought you had gone to the city an hour ago," said his father.

"I went two hours ago, but I have come back to bring you a friend whom I have just met," replied Edward; "some one I have not seen for twelve years or more. Can you guess?"

Dr. Halton could not guess; and when told it was Lewis Grahame, was as much in the dark as ever.

"Don't you remember him?" said Edward, somewhat disappointed. "I brought him here

sometimes. I am sure my mother will remember him."

"Oh, I do too!" said Florence, eagerly. "I recollect he used to play at ball with me on the stairs. Where has he been all this time?"

"Travelling all over the world. He went to Spain to make railways, and somehow got to Africa, and has gone everywhere. Papa will find him worth talking to. Come and see him: he is in the drawing-room. I have asked him to stay and have lunch; so get it up quickly, for I must be off."

As a consequence of Mrs. Halton's dread of taking cold, which dread obliged her to keep herself a complete prisoner within doors all the winter, she was always glad to see visitors, and, depending upon guests for any intercourse with the outer world, made them welcome at any hour of the day; and her friends were not prone to neglect her standing invitation to come whenever they liked. Dr. Halton took refuge in his library if he thought the conversation too idle or frivolous; but he was himself growing fonder of amusement

than formerly, and he liked to see Gertrude, who came in every day to see her mother. Gertrude had no children, and lived a life as easy as Aunt John's, though somewhat more intellectual, and devoted herself to the amusement of her husband's parents and her own, with the most perfect enjoyment. Robert liked society as well as she did, and it was by no means an unusual thing for them both to appear in the evening at Murchison Square, accompanied by a couple of guests who had been dining with them, and whom they invited to take coffee in Mrs. Halton's drawing-room, as if it had been their own. All guests were made welcome by Mrs. Halton. Conversation was her element, and Gertrude knew she could not please her mother better than by bringing in friends who were not mineralogical, and would not listen half the evening to long papers on the Oolite formation, read aloud by Dr. Theodore.

In such a circle as this, Lewis Grahame could not fail to be a favourite; he had conversation to suit the two rival factions, and both approved of him. "He is so bright, and so lively,"

Gertrude said to her mother. "Robert likes him so much." And Dr. Theodore observed to Florence,—“Some of the folks Gertrude brings here are very illiterate and ill-educated; but some I like. Mr. Duncombe is a serious and conversable man, and Mr. Grahame is a really intelligent fellow,—and not at all conceited.”

Perhaps Florence thought so too; for she smiled as she answered,—

“Do you know, papa, he says he used to know Margaret when she lived up in Enderby. He asked a great many questions about her the other day. He says he saw her very often. Papa——”

“Well, dear, what?” for Florence hesitated.

“You always told us,” she began, rather confused, “we were not to ask Margaret any questions about Lincolnshire or her home there; and we never did. But ought we never to know anything?”

“I think she would rather you asked her no questions,” said Dr. Theodore, somewhat at a loss what to reply; for the secret had been kept steadily all this time.

“No, certainly,” continued Florence, much

embarrassed ; “but—am I—ought I to stop Mr. Grahame from talking about her? He would have told me a great deal last night, if Robert had not come up. If he says anything more—shall I let him go on?”

“It is awkward to say to a stranger, you don’t want to hear details of your own family,” said Dr. Theodore meditatively.

“I should not feel it awkward with him ; he is such a thorough gentleman,” said Florence. “I should just say, I do not want to hear more ; I know my cousin’s life has been very unhappy ; and papa wishes——”

“Yes ; but, my dear, that won’t do at all. I don’t know that Mr. Grahame knows anything about her unhappiness ; and it won’t do to give him the idea that there was anything. No, no, Florrie ; her secrets are safe with you ; you can hear all Mr. Grahame has to tell. I don’t think it is much. You need not answer him anything in return.”

Dr. Theodore waited for some days, however, in some little uneasiness, expecting that Florence would come to him, bringing the whole story of Margaret’s elopement ; but he

heard nothing ; and at length he took courage, and said to Mr. Grahame—

“You used to meet my niece at Sandmouth, I think. How old was she then?”

“I saw Miss Cressingham last, eleven years ago—the week before I left Enderby. I left England a few weeks later,” Lewis replied.

“And did you never visit Sandmouth again?” asked Dr. Theodore uneasily.

“No; I have never been home, till last October. But if I had, I do not think I should have gone to Sandmouth; for about a year after I left Enderby, I heard Miss Cressingham was drowned by the oversetting of a boat; and I never knew that the report was untrue, till about four years ago, when a man I met in Egypt told me he had seen you at Paris, and you had a niece living with you.”

“Don’t mention that story of her being drowned to my daughters, if you please,” said Dr. Halton. “She has never spoken to them of her life before she became one of our family. As you saw her at Sandmouth, you must be aware that she was altogether neglected—making friends among very inferior people.”

Dr. Theodore, looking up, saw such a gleam of intelligence in Grahame's dark eyes, that he could have bitten his tongue off, metaphorically speaking, for saying so much. But Lewis betrayed his own thoughts no further; and only replying, "I fancied you would have trouble with them; she ought never to have been left there," rose, and followed Florence to the window, and commenced an earnest conversation with her.

"When will your cousin come to London?" he generally asked, before he took leave. And Florence answered, "Oh, not before the spring; and perhaps not then. Such an old friend as you are could run down to Yarmouth for a day, and call at Rawlstone. She would be glad to see you; and she has old Mrs. Thompson with her; so she can receive whom she likes."

"Are you sure she would not be offended?"

"Quite sure. It would give her very great pleasure to see an old friend."

But Mr. Grahame did not look convinced. "We did not part friends—quite," he said, with a little uneasy laugh; and as Florence

looked up, questioning, he remembered Dr. Theodore's injunctions, and only added, "I shall like to go; I can next week. Are you going to see this new thing at the Haymarket?"

Florence laughed, as she replied, "I have not been to a theatre these four years."

"And, I think, never wish to go," said her father. "Florence has no taste for such frivolity."

"I am sorry to sink in your good opinion," said Grahame. "I own to liking such frivolity. When I was in Italy, I went every night to the theatre; and really I think it is as good an amusement as novel reading."

Dr. Theodore had sat up till an early hour that morning, reading "Framley Parsonage," and felt rebuked. "But one does not read novels for amusement," he answered; "only young people do that. I read them to study the development of character."

Florence generally received her father's observations with reverence; but the laughter in Grahame's eyes was so infectious, that she was forced to stuff her cambric handkerchief

into her mouth, and walk away to hide her mirth.

"But do you know that the play we are going to see to-night is really a very moral and suggestive piece," said Lewis, speaking as gravely as if he had not looked poor Florence into irrepressible laughter. "Mr. Evanshaw is going; and I think it would really entertain you and Miss Halton."

"Not me, I am sure. I should be tired and ill with the gas," said Dr. Theodore, "and the bad air—I always eschew ill-ventilated halls on principle."

"Well, I can bear anything," said Lewis: "the tent of an Arab, or," he added, gravely, "a lecture-room with all the windows shut, and a magic lantern or chemical experiments in it. But, Miss Halton, do allow me to persuade you to accompany your sister to the theatre this evening."

"Did you really find the lecture-room close last night?" said Dr. Theodore. "The ventilating apparatus is on a perfectly new principle; my own invention, in fact. I thought it acted perfectly."

"Well, I am very sensitive to some kinds of smells," said Grahame; "and I thought the sulphuretted hydrogen rather strong; and it needed a great draught of air to blow it away."

Dr. Theodore made no answer; but as soon as Mr. Grahame had left the house, he took the diagrams of his ventilating apparatus, and pondered over them. "He was certainly right, Florry," he remarked. "The draught of air was not adequate to disperse the fumes of the sulphuretted hydrogen last night, though it is quite sufficient for renewing the ordinarily vitiated atmosphere of the lecture-room. Well, dear, suppose you go with Gerty to the theatre. You are young and strong, and can stand the hot air and fatigue."

Florence went to the theatre, and unfortunately found it so pleasant that she was persuaded to go again. And the appetite for frivolous amusement appeared to grow on her, for within the next week, she went to two lunch parties at her sister's house, besides going to the Zoological Gardens on Sunday. Dr. Theodore sorely missed his secretary.

"I really think I must find some one to come and write for me an hour or two a day," he said to his wife. "It is quite right. Florry should enjoy herself; it is proper at her age; but really I am getting all my papers into confusion."

It must be remarked, that during the last two years, Edward had succeeded in persuading his father to stay away from business altogether,—an arrangement which probably lengthened the years of the head-clerk, and produced many valuable contributions to scientific light literature.

"Well, dear, I think Edward had better find you a secretary," said Mrs. Halton. "Florry is naturally eager to be with Gertrude."

"Yes; Gerty can't buy a ribbon it seems, without getting her sister to walk up and down Oxford Street for an hour. I used to pity poor Florence, but lately I do not hear so much of shopping. Mr. Grahame persuades Gertrude to get up parties for rational objects. She will listen to him, and they have gone to the British Museum again to-day."

"Do you know, dear, that Margaret has written to ask me to let her come up here at once, as she would like to spend the spring in town. Is not that a wonderful change?"

"Has she quarrelled with White, then, or the new parson, or with Mrs. Thompson?" said Dr. Halton. "Something must have made Rawlstone too hot to hold her, or she would never come up to waste a spring on us."

"Perhaps she is lonely," said Mrs. Halton. "I am very glad she is coming."

Dr. Halton had his own misgivings that something unpleasant must have happened to send Margaret to them in January,—a time when she always professed to like the country better than town; but he hazarded no more conjectures, and his wife pleased herself with thinking that now May would have a chance of learning to appreciate Edward.

"Can you guess my news?" she said to her son, as he ran up stairs to the drawing-room five minutes before dinner.

"Margaret coming?" he asked.

“How could you tell? It might have been about your sisters or anybody?”

“I knew by your face,” answered her son; “that is, I knew it was not about Florence or Gertrude.”

He might have said he knew she was forming plans for his happiness, and that he felt obliged to her, but he dreaded lest her want of discretion should mar all. He knew he had not as yet succeeded in winning his cousin's confidence; that she still disliked him, and he feared if his mother commenced to champion him, she would only damage his cause. Of the depth of May's hatred of him, he had no idea. Had he realised it, he might have despaired of ever conquering it; but he attributed her constraint in his company to her uneasy consciousness that he knew her secret, and to their rare intercourse; and he hoped it would wear off if they could be a few weeks together. As to letting her know that he loved her, there was no question of that at the present moment. There must be positive proof that she was legally free to accept a husband before the idea could be broached to

her ; but Edward thought he should be quite contented if he could think himself possessed of her confidence and friendship, even though she did not suspect he might prove her lover some day. But he had not, he knew, made much progress towards gaining that confidence, nor had he any chance of doing so while she remained at Rawlstone, where he was never invited. When his parents were there, he sometimes had run down for a day or two, but he saw he was considered an intruder by Margaret, and always came away in a bad humour with himself and the world. But now that she was coming to be his mother's guest, he should be able to do her many welcome services ; and if only she could be persuaded to stay some time (and he devoutly hoped an infectious fever might break out at Rawlstone and prevent her returning), he thought he might make some headway. He counted the days till she came, and blushed when he found himself setting off home from the counting-house an hour earlier than his usual earliest time, almost as soon as Mr. Halton had gone. The head-clerk who was

accustomed to see Edward stay till half-past six or much later, looked up at the clock, and then at his own watch, while Edward, feeling absolutely guilty, hastened down stairs as fast as he might.

He found boxes in the hall, and Agnes, Margaret's maid, flirting with François who had a great *tendresse* for that young lady, whom he saw about once a year, when she and her mistress honoured Murchison Square with their presence for a few weeks. Edward saw there were four large trunks, and inferred that mistress and maid meant to stay a longer time than usual; and while he changed his boots and coat, wondered if this unexpected visit boded him any good. How would she receive him? Most likely just as usual; but then, in which of her tempers? For her tempers were as various as her dresses, and never to be anticipated or prophesied. The only thing of which he might be sure was this: that in whatever mood of mind she might be, he would be worse received than any one else. That was, he thought, certain, and therefore he had only to speculate as to whether he should find her

all smiles to the world generally, and gracious even to him ; or cold and serious with all, and curt and uncivil to himself. He was agreeably surprised when he entered the room, for she turned to him with a smile, and pressed his hand so cordially, that he thought she meant to say, all the past coldness should be forgotten. This daring hope seemed to be confirmed, as he heard her say, in answer to a lament from Mrs. Halton that Dr. Theodore was restive against the advice of his physician, who told him to write less and walk out more,—

“ Oh, Aunt Alice, I'll make him walk out with me. Of course he dislikes it in this dingy fog. But do we ever like what is good for us ? Don't we always hate people who do us good against our will ? ”

Was it possible, Edward said to himself, that these words had reference to him and his work in driving that wretched rascal away, ten years ago ? He could hardly believe it ; and yet there was an evident relenting of manner towards him—a desire, he thought, on her part to be friendly, as if she knew now

that his intentions had been kind, and regretted never having recognised it till now.

"Have I time to run and see Gerty before dinner?" May asked, looking at Edward as if to suggest he should offer to go with her.

"She is coming to dine here this evening, and Robert too," said Mrs. Halton. "And dinner will be ready in less than an hour. Is not Florrie come home?"

As she spoke, however, Florence came in with her bonnet and cloak on, and followed by Mr. Grahame.

"Am I late?" Florence began. "Gertrude said I should not be. We have all been to Kew, to show Mr. Duncombe the green-houses. Oh, Margaret, are you come? I am so glad. Oh stop! let me introduce this gentleman. Have you ever met him before?" she asked, archly, while Margaret looked doubtfully at the bronzed and bearded stranger.

"I can hardly hope Miss Cressingham will remember me," said Grahame. "It is so long since——" But at the sound of his voice, May sprang forward and caught both his hands in

hers. "Lewis! it is—yes, it is you. Oh, of course I remember you. Why have you not come to see me? I live at Rawlstone now—my own house, you remember."

"The Garde Doloureuse do you mean?"

"Yes. Sit down;" and she pointed to a chair close by the one she took herself. "Why did not you come?"

"I dared not venture so near the fortress without a protector, and I could not persuade Miss Halton to escort me down," said Lewis, laughing, and then May laughed, and asked,—

"Have you been all this time making railways in Spain, or did you realize your dreams of travelling all over the world, and specially to Timbuctoo?"

"Pretty well; yes, even to Timbuctoo," replied Lewis, charmed to find his boyish projects and fancies so well remembered by her. "And what have you been doing in the Garde Doloureuse?"

"I have been fighting a long fight against aristocratic tyranny and agricultural ignorance. For six years I have fought it, and I am pretty well worn out. Yes; I have had to fight over

every furrow that has been ploughed, and every acre that has been sown. I have upheld the flag of popular education till I have lost the friendship and esteem of all my neighbours, and am now courting martyrdom for my opinions about poor-law reform."

"Have you a yacht? Are you building a university for the fishermen?"

"I will build one, if you will take the professor's chair in it," said May, laughing merrily.

"No, I have no yacht; I have a boat, and I go on the water sometimes; but you have no idea, leading the idle life of a wanderer yourself, how carefully we owners of land have to employ every minute of our valuable time. The responsibilities that weigh upon us are so awful, that we can only give ourselves the time requisite even for sleep, by——"

"By snatching an hour's repose in the hay-field, I suppose," he suggested, as May stopped, recalled to gravity by the puzzled expression on Florrie's face, as she listened in amazement to this burst of childish confidences, which she could not reconcile with Grahame's assertion that they had parted "not friends."

Edward was no less surprised than Florence, but he was less pleased ; and he rose, pushed back his chair, and said he thought it must be time to dress for dinner.

“ Yes ; I think those who mean to dress for that solemnity have no time to lose,” said Dr. Theodore, who, himself the very perfection of dinner respectability, was comfortably cutting the leaves of his *Spectator*, in his armchair by the fire. “ Perhaps wanderers on the face of the earth, like Florence and Margaret, are indifferent to such trivialities as dinner, except as eaten under a hedge or——”

“ On the contrary, they who wander up and down the face of the earth are always seeking what they may devour,” said Lewis ; “ and I must beg you to excuse me, or I shall keep you waiting.”

“ And a hundred and sixty miles’ journey gives me a good appetite,” said May, as she hastened upstairs after Florence, while Grahame hurried off to his lodgings to dress, and returned almost as soon as Gertrude and Robert appeared, bringing with them their new friend,

Mr. Duncombe, who was also a wanderer like Lewis, but chiefly in California and Australia, and was not specially interested in any mineralogical subject, except gold.

CHAPTER X.

WHY SHE LEFT RAWLSTONE.

DR. THEODORE was right in supposing that some consideration out of the common way had brought May to London in January. She was in urgent need of a friend and counsellor, for perplexities had crowded upon her in which Mr. White could not advise her, and one trouble was of a nature that left her no choice but to go for a time away from Rawlstone.

When first Margaret began talking of the responsibilities of landholders, and proposed building cottages on her own farm, the neighbouring gentry were highly incensed, and Sir Henry Churchill especially tried to reason with her, as, being her next neighbour, he had many opportunities of doing. He was a man of about forty, and very gentlemanly; and she was compelled to listen to his objections politely, and answer them in as amiable a spirit as they were offered. The argument was renewed whenever they met; for Sir Henry felt his

neighbour was wrong, and was raising a spirit of discontent among the labourers. But little by little, as time went on, the baronet began to give ground, and yield his antagonist an easy victory, though he always came a few days later to express himself quite unconvinced, and had to be converted again by an hour's talking. Margaret was too thoroughly persuaded of the importance of her own political theories to imagine he came for any other object than to combat her heresies, and esteemed his visit a high compliment, without ever suspecting the real feelings he cherished for her. Mrs. Thompson saw the truth, and, ignorant of her friend's real position, rejoiced, but she said nothing, fearing that if Margaret had any hint of Sir Henry's intentions, she would find some difficulty in receiving his visits while her aunt and uncle were away. Mrs. Thompson was certain that Sir Henry Churchill was only waiting till Dr. or Mrs. Halton should come to Rawlstone to avow his affection; but so long as Margaret was alone, she knew his lips would be sealed. So she made no remark, and the baronet continued his visits, waiting patiently, or im-

patiently, until Dr. Theodore should come down for a week. He was just coming to the resolution that he would follow the doctor to town, and seek an interview with him, when May precipitated events by riding over to Churchill Park to intercede again for the irreclaimable Fisher, and was so earnest and so bewitching while pleading his cause, that Sir Henry lost his head, and was betrayed into saying,—

“You know well that it is entirely against my principles to forgive him; but I will, as you ask it. You know, too, well, there is nothing I would not do if you really wished it.”

“I wish you would make Fisher an under-keeper, then,” began May, laughing. But she stopped, silent in dismay, as the true meaning of his words dawned upon her; while he, hurried on by the excitement of the moment, said all that which he had told himself ought not to be said till Dr. Theodore came back; and had offered her his heart and hand, with a most passionate rapidity of speech, before she could check him, or think how to answer this unlooked-for burst of passion. Her voice refused

to come to her bidding, and for several moments she could not utter a word.

“Oh no, no, Sir Henry!” she cried as soon as she could speak. “It is of no use. Oh say no more, pray, if you have any pity for me. It is no use, it never can be. Uncle Theodore ought to have told you. Oh, you must never think of me again. It can’t be! It’s no use.”

Sir Henry, wakened to the impropriety of his conduct in declaring his affection to the lady in his own drawing-room, was now speechless; and May hurried on, catching her breath with something very like a sob, “Oh, if I had thought you could ever have cared for such a foolish girl as I am, I would have told you long ago, it can be no use. It can never be. It is useless to think of it.”

“Why is it useless?” asked Sir Henry, taking her hand, and gathering comfort and assurance from her distress, which he interpreted favourably for himself. “You think you cannot love me because I am older than you, is it? I have been very wrong to speak to you now. I feel it, and trust you will forgive me; but some other time when your uncle is——”

“No, no ; that is not it,” said Margaret, drawing her hand away. “Oh, how can I tell you ? It is that I cannot, cannot love any one ; indeed I cannot.” And in desperation, she added, “I am bound by a promise,—a promise made long ago, and that cannot be broken.”

“A promise ?” Sir Henry looked perfectly incredulous. “But, my dear Miss Cressingham, no promise is binding when all affection has ceased, and you do not love—is it not so ?” he asked, interrupting himself,—“you do not love any one else.”

Margaret thought that she ought to say Yes to this question, as the quickest way of ending Sir Henry’s hopes, but she could not force herself to say it ; she only murmured, “I promised, and I must not forget.”

“But will he ever claim your promise ?” Sir Henry asked, in a hoarse voice. “Will he ever come ?”

“God grant he may not !” Margaret murmured to herself, but she struggled for self-command, and succeeded in saying,—

“But he may come, and therefore I must think of no one else.”

But her face had betrayed more than she knew. Sir Henry felt certain that wherever her word was pledged, her heart was not there with it. He recovered hope, and with hope, a sense of propriety ; and when he spoke, it was not to press her with any more questions. He said gravely, and yet tenderly withal, " I am very grieved that I should have been so thoughtless as to say all this to you without having seen Dr. Halton first. I might have spared you this distress. I only trust you will forgive it. Can I hope you will ? "

" Oh, I have nothing to forgive, Sir Henry. I shall always feel honoured by the thought of your esteem," said May, giving him her hand frankly. And then thinking the interview had better be cut short, she moved towards the door. He offered to open it, but with his fingers on the handle, he stopped a moment.

" Will you let me still come over to Rawlstone sometimes, and see you as an old friend," he asked. " You need not fear I shall forget myself again as I have done to-day."

"Oh, come indeed, and I shall be very glad," said May. "It would be a great grief to me to lose your friendship. Please do come."

"I shall come then gladly, and be sure that, whatever I feel, I shall never say a word again till you give me leave."

Margaret was leaving the room with a thankful belief it was all over, and Sir Henry saved from his unfortunate folly, but these last words told her it was all wrong, and he had completely misunderstood her.

"Sir Henry, I thought I had explained myself," she said, almost gasping for breath. "But it seems I have not. You must not hope at all. This promise will last as long as he lives. I never shall feel free unless I can be sure he is dead. It is useless for you to wait for me. For your own sake, do forget me as fast as you can. You might just as hopelessly,—yes, just as hopelessly," she added, struggling to speak the words, "think of a married woman."

"Miss Cressingham! you are not married?" he cried, falling back a step in terror.

"I don't know; perhaps I am," said May desperately. "Don't ask me any questions, Sir Henry. I tell you I would not make you unhappy if I could help it, but I dare not tell you to wait for me. I dare not."

She flung open the door, and crossed the hall. Sir Henry stood still for a moment, but as he saw her open the house door, he hurried forward, to assist her into the saddle. As he put the reins into her hand, he said, trying hard to speak in his accustomed voice,—

"Be assured I will do what you want about Fisher. Good-bye. Heaven bless you!"

Margaret could answer nothing, she was trembling with agitation. She looked round for Fisher, and saw that he was standing a few yards off, and it struck her that he was close by the open drawing-room window, through which he must have heard all they had said. This thought, for a short time drove every other out of her mind. With a grave bow, she turned from Sir Henry Churchill, beckoned to Fisher, and rode down the avenue, unconscious how Sir Henry stood on the threshold and looked

after her ; and as soon as she had passed the gate, she sent the groom on a message to a neighbouring farm-house, and called Fisher to her.

“ You heard what I was saying in the drawing-room ? ” she asked quickly. Fisher met her look steadily, and she saw he had heard all.

“ Yes, I did, Miss Cressingham ; but you may be sure it shall not go any further in Rawlstone.”

“ Thank you for promising that, Fisher. I do not offer to bribe you, but if you will take care of my secret, you may be sure you shall always have a cottage you can call your own.”

“ You may trust me, Miss Cressingham. I would never let out any one’s secret, and least of all yours. Besides I have known it a long time.”

“ You ? ” May started violently, and drew the rein so sharply that her horse reared, and for a minute, she could do nothing but pat and soothe him. Fisher, however, took hold of the rein, and when the horse was pacified, said,—

"I knew Sally Tebbs, my lady, and from what she told me I could guess. But I have never told it any one, and never will, you may depend on it. It would drive you mad, I see, if Freeman were alive and come back."

"Not mad, Fisher," replied May, shivering as she spoke. "I would not wait to be driven mad; I shall go there," and she pointed to the grey sea, that came in sight through the trees. "It's an easy death there."

Fisher looked at her gravely, and shook his head; and then nodded, as if he agreed it was the best thing she could do. But then, merely saying, "You may depend on me," he fell back, and took the road to Yarmouth.

At any other time, May would have been terribly excited by finding her secret in his possession, but she was soon too much engrossed with Sir Henry's grief to dwell long on any other subject. She was deeply moved by his distress. She respected and liked him. He was the very perfection of gentlemanly good-breeding, although to-day he had been

carried away by strong feeling, perhaps, beyond the bounds of decorum. He was, she thought, a man of high intellect, and there was in him a strength of purpose combined with a gentleness of manner, that had made her look up to him as a friend upon whom she could thoroughly rely. She could not but recognise that if she had been free, she would have had but little difficulty in returning his affection.

For several days she thought of him sitting sadly in his library, indifferent to its gloriously carved ceiling and oriel windows, or riding listlessly through the park thinking of her.

The elm-trees of Churchill Park were visible from the upper windows of Rawlstone ; and she could not help reflecting how little she would have had to give up of her present pleasures if she had exchanged one home for the other. She would still have had her school and her favourite cottagers to look after, and her uncle and aunt could have occupied Rawlstone Hall as tenants, if she had gone to Churchill Park. It must be

owned, May was more in love with Churchill Park than with its owner ; but she was very much in need of a friend and brother ; and failing a brother, had been very ready to make Sir Henry supply the want. But by this unfortunate accident of his falling in love with her, she had lost the friend to whom she had long looked as a safe counsellor, when she was bewildered between the conflicting theories of her uncle and Mr. White, and whose countenance she knew upheld her in credit with the rest of the county, already disposed to condemn her as a radical and a heretic, a friend to poachers and union men, intent on fostering discontent among the lower classes and irreligion in the young. She was involved in continual difficulties, and she found that to apply to her uncle only led her into worse dangers, as he talked of the right of all men to a share of the land, and the duty of the State to educate every individual in it. In these perplexities she had latterly hastened to tell her doubts to Sir Henry Churchill, and he had heard the case so patiently, and argued both sides, as it seemed to her, so

fairly, as to help her to come to a conclusion, more or less leaning, it may be presumed, to the conservative or orthodox side of the question, though of this May herself was unconscious, and had learned to look on his counsels as the safest to follow, and himself as the true friend in need.

In losing Sir Henry she had lost one of her best friends who would have been most invaluable to her, if that terrible day should ever come, when she would have to rely on all the moral aid that the sympathy of her neighbours could give her, in resisting the tyranny of the legal "protector," who had left her so long, and yet might return and claim her as his property. Resolved as she was to resist, even to the extent of leaving England for ever if necessary, friends of position and character were most needful to her, and she saw that in losing Sir Henry she had made the first step to losing others. She understood now why two of his cousins had come from their estate twenty-five miles distant to make her acquaintance, thereby flattering her self-esteem, and per-

suading her she was going to find sympathetic friends in these ladies. This new acquaintanceship would now cease ; and in fact she would soon be living at Rawlstone, alone, uncared for, and shunned as a radical and dangerous person, until the dreadful day came when there should be news of Freeman, and she knew not where to go for help or counsel.

It was no wonder if, shut up alone with her own thoughts and fears, Margaret suffered her mind to dwell more than was wise upon Sir Henry's disappointment, and even wonder at times whether, if she had now been free, he would have considered her run-away marriage too great a blot to overlook when he knew the story. Sometimes she thought she ought to be glad that he should have felt this great interest in her, for in the event of her wanting help, he would still be anxious to do all he could to help her. But before he could do this he must have so far recovered from his attachment as to be almost indifferent to her ; in fact, to really be of much use to her, he must have married ;

and she almost laughed as she found herself mentally reviewing the eligible ladies of the neighbourhood, and calculating the chances of one of them consoling him for her loss.

But apart from all considerations for the future, she felt she was acting unkindly to her disappointed lover, in remaining in his neighbourhood while he was constantly exposing himself to the chance of meeting her in his rides and walks. He would not, it seemed, try to forget her; he would not go away and seek fresh scenes; and she, knowing how hopeless his passion was, thought she owed it to him to help him in the work of forgetting. In a fit of generous impulse she resolved to go away herself, and live for some months either in London or Enderby.

At this present time, Enderby Grange was occasioning her great perplexity. It was in the hands of an inexperienced, and, she feared, a dishonest bailiff; and Mr. White was urging her every day to do that which she knew she could not do,—sell the farm, and buy more land near Rawlstone. Mr.

White, looking upon his mistress's refusal to sell the Grange, as a piece of sheer folly and obstinacy, had pestered her with arguments, and was now so sulky that she could not send him down even for another visit to Enderby to see how matters really stood there. She was much troubled, and could form no determination whatever save one, and that was, not to consult Dr. Theodore. May had given Mrs. Thompson a hint as to why they received no more visits from Sir Henry, and that good old lady was at no loss to understand why Miss Cressingham talked of leaving the Hall for a time, but she strongly counselled her to go to London instead of Enderby.

"We shall find it very cold at Enderby, and uncomfortable," she said; "and if this bailiff is a cheat, as Mr. White thinks, you will not be so well able to control him, or take any measures against him, as if you went first to London, and asked advice of your friends."

"But I have no one to ask advice from," objected May. "Uncle Theodore believes

the man is honest, and Mr. John Halton will incur no responsibility. I must go and find out how things are before I take any measures ; but I hardly know what to do."

"Then, my dear Miss Cressingham, speak to your cousin, Mr. Edward Halton. Everyone says he is a clever man of business, and you may be sure his counsel would be disinterested."

"I will never ask advice of him," May replied shortly ; but as Mrs. Thompson was discreet enough to say no more, and appeared satisfied that he was not to be consulted, May began to think whether it would be possible to her to ask counsel from him. He knew her real position, and therefore would not advise her to sell the Grange, and she believed he had her interest at heart as far as her property was concerned. It cost her a struggle, and a hard one, to bring herself to think patiently of appealing to him. Her soul revolted against it, but she knew that if the day of real trouble came, if it ever should come, she should have to seek his help, and she might as well fore-

stall the bitterness of that time, and ask counsel of him now. She could no longer hope to find a counsellor or friend in Sir Henry, and she must look somewhere else; for her uncle was worse than none, and as her pride became every day more humbled, she decided to taste the cup of humiliation now, and seek a counsellor in Edward, and look elsewhere for the friend.

And so May came to London resolved on reconciling herself with Edward; but it was many weeks before she could bring herself to such a pitch of confidence as to ask his advice about the Grange. But she tried to like him, and her cordiality was appreciated by him and Aunt Alice, although the very friendly welcome she had given Lewis made her kindness towards Edward seem rather the result of general amenity than an overture of reconciliation. Of Lewis they saw much; too much, Edward opined. He did not let a day pass without calling either at Murchison Square or on Mrs. Evanshaw, unless he chanced to meet one of the ladies out walking, or they met by arrangement at

some evening entertainment. It seemed that to Lewis it was indifferent which of the three cousins he met, so that he found one. If he called in Murchison Square, he stayed an hour looking over maps with Florence; if he met Margaret in the park, he tempted her to linger there till he had had his talk out; and, failing her, he went to Mrs. Evanshaw.

"There never was a man so smitten with yellow hair. What you women find to admire in him I can't imagine," said Edward vindictively. "He does not know one of you from the other; it is all one whom he talks to, so long as you will ask him questions about the places he has seen."

"It is only Florence who asks him questions," said Margaret. "I tease him, and laugh at him, and Gerty only asks his opinion about her drawing-room furniture. It is only Florrie who flatters him."

"I wish Florrie would go out and walk a little, instead of writing all day," said Edward.

She is growing quite pale and thin. Florrie, let me prescribe for you. A good walk with Margaret every day whenever she goes."

"Oh no, Edward; I am so tired, and she takes such long walks," Florence answered. "I will go with you if you will take me."

"I wish I had the time, dear," answered her brother, stooping down to kiss her cheek, a most unusual display of fondness with him. "But I wish you would go out with Margaret, and not let her be always talking to him," he whispered. "Do go; there's a good little sister."

"Eh!" exclaimed Florence, wakened to a new perception of things by these last words, that seemed to imply he had an interest in the matter. "Edward!" but he had escaped.

"Margaret seems somewhat fascinated by that young Grahame," said John Halton to his brother. "I should not be surprised if we see him at Rawlstone at last."

"Margaret is not free to think of any one yet," said Dr. Theodore quickly. "You know that as well as I do."

"Why, has not Edward told you he has heard a report that Freeman is dead in jail? Edward thinks it is true."

"So he says; but I do not feel it true, and

I have not ever mentioned it to Margaret," said Dr. Theodore. "It is only report. If it is true, I do not think she would marry Grahame. I think he cares for some one else."

Every one else had thought this, and Florrie herself had thought so until within the last three weeks; for Grahame's interest in her had been too evident to escape anybody's eyes. But of late Florence had begun to doubt if Lewis cared whether she spoke to him or not. All his conversation was addressed to Margaret, and he made continual allusion to old times and former recollections, of which Florence know nothing. Gradually she began to feel herself one too many in these conversations; she mistook May's attempts to change the subject of discourse from Sandmouth topics, for a desire to keep all these precious memories secret from her. May was all the time afraid that Grahame would make some unfortunate allusion to the Freemans, or even to Jesse, which should arouse her cousin's curiosity; but Lewis, by some mysterious sense of discretion, avoided mentioning their names; and while recalling

his own excursions and rambles with May, never spoke of any person they had met, except once, when he laughed at the recollection of Miss Primer quarrelling with a slater on the roof. He left May to guide the conversation, only insisting on keeping before her the picture of the half-forgotten past, with himself as the principal figure in the foreground. This tact and silent courtesy won on Margaret's heart. She enjoyed his companionship, and showed her pleasure in it so unreservedly that Edward would have been jealous if he had not been ashamed to be so, and had to quiet himself with the reflection that as long as Freeman was alive she could care for nobody.

Moreover Margaret was gracious to all; to Lewis most, but also to Edward, and even to Mr. Duncombe, a grave, saturnine man, lately arrived from Australia, and much admired by Mr. and Mrs. Evanshaw. Dr. Theodore detested him, because he could only talk of gold, sheep, and colonial prospects, and Lewis ridiculed him because Mrs. Evanshaw made a lion of him, but Margaret said he was clever.

CHAPTER XI.

DR. THEODORE'S FRIENDS.

MARGARET seemed cordial with Edward, but she still shrank from talking to him about her affairs, for the doing so would naturally involve the consideration of Freeman's whereabouts, and it would still be an intense humiliation to hear Edward allude to her unlucky marriage. He knew she had been a fool, and that she was suffering the consequences of her folly; and he could not but be an unintentional censor and criticiser of her life; and therefore she must hate him. And she did hate Edward, with a hatred all the more intense because it was only in part justifiable. Now that she did know what a fool she had been, she ought to have been grateful to John Halton and Edward for the efforts they had made to undo the consequences of her madness; but then it was an open question whether, if they had not interfered, she would not have been as well off as she

was now. They had not succeeded in protecting her real interests by their interference; they had broken her heart, made her a widow, and Jesse an outcast; and they could not save her from him now should he yet return. They had destroyed her early actual happiness, and perhaps prepared fearful misery for her in the future. It is true that her uncle Theodore was equally to blame for the painful position in which she now was; since but for his untimely interference, Edward and John Halton would have taken care that a proper settlement of her property should have secured her from all molestation; but his kindness and gentleness had made her love him, and, having forgiven him who was the real cause of her misfortunes, like most women she indemnified herself for this forbearance, by allotting a double portion of blame to the other offenders who really deserved less. But they had added insult and cruelty to all they did, and had never acknowledged themselves to blame in the matter as he had done, and thereby won her forgiveness; and she had learned to love him,

and so she held the other two responsible for his share of the wrong. It is the way of women, and perhaps of men too.

Nevertheless, May having made up her mind to ask Edward's help, had been schooling herself to treat him as a friend, in which endeavour she had been much aided by the spirit of grateful recognition in which he met her advances, and also by the continual presence of Lewis, who absorbed all her attention, and made her forget her awkward relations with her cousin. So one afternoon in March, when he came home unexpectedly early, she met him with a smile that made him forget all his incipient jealousy of Grahame, and also an appointment with his uncle, and only linger talking with her.

"Have you heard from Rawlstone lately?" Edward asked. "I see in the *Times* that your neighbour, Sir Henry Churchill, is going to stand for the county, in the event of the present Conservative member being unseated for bribery."

"No. Is he? I am so glad!" replied May, feeling that political excitement was

the best thing for Sir Henry. "When will the election be? Oh, I hope he will get in. We will all go down to Rawlstone and do what we can to help him."

Her cheeks were red with excitement.

"What a child she is," Edward thought; but he said aloud,—“I had no idea you took an interest in politics.”

“Of course I do. Have not I an interest in getting a good man to represent the county? I am a farmer, am I not? Oh, Edward, I wish you would give me a little advice about my farm at Enderby. I am in such perplexity.”

She had said it now, and she trembled as she heard her own words, and felt she had hopelessly broken through the barrier of reserve she had so long maintained between them. He responded to her overture quickly enough, even eagerly,—

“If I can help you in anything, of course I will,” he answered, his eyes sparkling with pleasure. “I heard the old tenant had left, and it was in the care of a person named Cheate. Does he merit his name?”

"I am afraid so. Mr. White has been down there, and says it is going to rack and ruin, and he wants me to sell it; but that, you know, I cannot," she added, and her cheeks burned with shame as she for the first time alluded to Freeman in Edward's presence. But her cousin treated the matter as if it had always been recognised between them, and replied quietly,—

"And you ought not to sell it if you could. It is good land, and the neighbourhood is improving. You need only get rid of that man, and find a proper tenant."

"But one won't make his appearance," said May, half laughing to cover her real confusion.

"No; Cheate takes good care of that of course. But he must go, and one must be found, and some one trustworthy put in charge until it is let. Will you trust me to attend to the business for you? I will manage it."

"Oh, indeed I would, but you cannot go there, it is too far away."

"Oh, yes I can. I have business contin-

ually at the north; and going round by Enderby will not add much to my journeys."

He had had far more difficult business to conduct on her account ten years before, he remembered, when trains went slower, and he was newer to work. He made her draw him a plan of the farm, and give him all the details she knew of the expenses and incomings; and then he went to Rawlstone and took Mr. White into council, and again came to London to tell Margaret he thought he had better go to Enderby, and turning off the bailiff at a day's notice, place some trusty man in charge, for that every day of Cheate's management was now a loss to her.

Edward had a great deal to say to May of what White thought of the farm at Enderby, and many messages from him concerning farm operations at Rawlstone, besides many approving encomiums on White himself, and the practical knowledge of everything he possessed. May was as anxious to hear as he was to talk, and sat

the whole evening listening to him, to the no small vexation of Lewis, who came in after dinner, as was his wont whenever he knew they were likely to be at home. Grahame hovered near the little table which Edward had loaded with papers, and tried to make Miss Cressingham include him in the conversation; but as often as she turned with a smile to address a remark to him, her cousin called her attention to a column of figures he was adding up, and she was obliged to let Grahame's reply go unheeded. After several attempts, Lewis was compelled to recognise Edward's determination to keep him out of their conversation, and he walked away to inspect the progress of a game of chess that Florence was playing with Mr. Duncombe. He was more successful in interfering at this table, and Mr. Duncombe wondered why his antagonist neglected an obvious checkmate which he had anticipated. He made haste to retrieve his error, and win the game, and they all three joined Dr. Theodore, who had been reading a scientific work of the newest type, and was now

ready to skim off the cream of it for their especial benefit. Edward and Margaret arranged all their business, and Edward went to Enderby the next day.

As he drove through the town, now increased to nearly twice its former size, and recognised with difficulty the inn where he had once dined, and the bank where he had made such important discoveries, he allowed himself to speculate a little upon what would have now been Margaret's position if he had not discovered that lucky forgery, which enabled him to drive Freeman away from her at the time when her girlish infatuation would have made her resist all schemes for ridding herself from him.

"She would have had a horrible life of it with him," he thought, "if he had not drunk himself into his grave by now, or got into prison. I wonder where he is."

It did occur to Edward very unpleasantly, that since Freeman's leaving England had only ended in making him even worse than he was, and that he might still come back and claim Margaret, the discovery of the

forged bill had not been altogether a fortunate circumstance. But he checked this thought, for his reason told him that ten years of peace had been gained by it, and that the chances were now twenty to one that Freeman was either dead in prison, or would, when he came out, commit some fresh offence that would secure his being detained in America till his death. Edward had followed up the clue he had obtained from the temperance newspaper so far as to write to the police authorities at Cincinnati, and several towns in Ohio, and inquire if the Englishman called Freeman had been convicted of the murder ascribed to him in the sensational and highly moral little paragraph he forwarded for inspection; but his correspondent could give him no information, and he ceased to make more inquiries in deference to the advice of Mr. Quillett, who considered that Freeman's long silence might be taken as a proof he doubted the legality of his marriage with Margaret Cressingham, and strongly deprecated any course of inquiries that might disturb him in that idea. Edward

however had lately heard from one of his former correspondents, that Freeman had died in jail, and he felt very impatient to hear this news confirmed. But he had promised Mr. Quillett not to write again without consulting him, and he was forced to remain content with the probabilities, which however were promising enough.

But he no longer concealed from himself that he intended to marry his cousin as soon as he could prove her free.

"So Mr. Edward Halton is gone I hear to Enderby," said Mr. Grahame to Margaret. "Do you ever go there yourself?" May had set off to walk across the park to meet Gertrude, and had found Lewis going in the same direction. He had nothing to do with his time, and indulged in a great deal of pedestrian exercise.

"No; I never go there," said May, slowly and unwillingly. "Don't talk of it."

"I beg your pardon," said Lewis quickly, much surprised at this sudden fit of caprice. "When are you going to Rawlstone?"

He asked this only to change the subject

out of deference to her wish, and expected no answer, nor did he listen for one; his own thoughts were too much occupied with the strange mystery which she seemed determined to throw round the last year she had passed at Sandmouth. That some very painful memory was associated with it he had no doubt; but of what nature? He remembered that within a year of his leaving Enderby, he had heard that May Cressingham was drowned in a storm, and no letter from his father had contradicted that report, and he had never mistrusted it, until one day in Alexandria he heard an Englishman speak of Dr. Halton and his family, and entering into conversation with him, learned that May was alive, and living with her aunt. The news caused him more pleasure than surprise. He had often found reports false and unfounded before, and he never thought any more of the matter, nor remembered it when he made the acquaintance of Mrs. Evanshaw and Florence, until he found to his astonishment that they knew no particulars of their cousin's life at Sandmouth, and that she never spoke

to any one of it. He then came to the not unnatural conclusion that the old report was so far true, as that she had narrowly escaped death by drowning; and that either the recollection of the event was painful to her, or that the shock had for a time disturbed her reason, or impaired her memory so that she had had to begin life afresh after it. This idea distressed him much, and he had refrained from asking intrusive questions of Florence; but as soon as he saw Miss Cressingham, he was sufficiently convinced that she had never suffered any loss of memory or intellect, and he could only explain the silence about Sandmouth by the supposition that she had while there, provoked the anger of her guardian in some way, and been harshly treated in consequence. He remembered how she had chafed under the authority of one governess, perhaps under another she had risen in open rebellion; perhaps Mr. Halton did not like his niece to be so intimate with that old woman down in the village. Lewis was so near the truth that he could not miss it; and at this

moment, while walking with Margaret under the trees, a light broke in upon him. It was about that family that the dispute had arisen, he felt certain. Mr. Halton had insisted on her giving them up, and she had been restive and sulky; and perhaps she had gone out in the boat with that rough cub, Jesse, and he had been drowned when she so nearly was. Lewis comprehended it all now, he believed, and quite understood why both Margaret and her uncle should have wished to ignore everything that had happened at Sandmouth; and he congratulated himself that an unconscious instinct of avoiding a painful subject had hitherto made him scrupulously careful, while recalling old memories to Miss Cressingham, to avoid any mention of the Freemans. Had he done so, he should inevitably have given her serious distress; he had been very fortunate, he thought, as he pondered over these things, while he walked on, hearing nothing of her reply as to the length of her probable stay in London.

On her side, Margaret hardly knew what

she said. She felt a sudden impulse to take him into her confidence, for she longed for his sympathy. He was the one person who could understand how utterly lonely had been her life at Sandmouth, and how natural it was that she should, in her isolation there, have fallen into the snare Josiah had spread for her. But while she hesitated how to begin the tale, she remembered how he had despised and looked down on Jesse, as a mere groom and serving lad, and she doubted whether she should not lower herself too much in his eyes by confessing the extent of her infatuation for him. While she still hesitated, letting I dare not wait upon I would, and one impulse struggling with another, Lewis asked—

“Is Churchill Park close to Rawlstone? I see Sir Henry Churchill is going to contest the county.”

These words recalled her to her discretion. No; her dignity and her position were not only her own. It was due to the friends who had come round her at Rawlstone, that her disgrace should be hidden

as long as possible, even from Lewis, although she was sure he could be trusted. But respect for herself as one who had been honoured by Sir Henry Churchill's regard, demanded silence, and she steeled herself against the weakness of desiring sympathy from Lewis, and threw herself into a wholesome enthusiasm for the election.

"We must get him in. I am sorry you say 'contest.' Do you think he has a good chance?" she asked. But Grahame's attention was caught by a figure at a distance.

"Is it he? Yes, it is. Look, Miss Cressingham; there comes a friend of mine landed yesterday from America. I met him by chance. I had not seen him since we travelled over the prairies together two years ago. May I introduce him?—Mr. Sumner?"

"Oh, with pleasure. I see he is a traveller, and I infer him to be a greater lion than yourself."

"Why? How do you settle that? By 'the lion port and awe-commanding face'?"

"Oh no; only by the size of his beard," said Margaret, laughing. "We thought you

outraged the feelings of the civilized world sufficiently, but your friend out-herods Herod."

"A lion would be nothing without a mane," said Lewis, stroking his own tawny beard complacently. "But would you like to hear this one roar?"

"Yes, if you like. Ah! there comes Mrs. Evanshaw. I will go and meet her, and you can go and catch your lion, and bring him here. I will prepare her to admire the noble,—what shall I say? king of the forest?"

"Oh yes; Sumner is a king of the forest, he owns half a county of backwoods, and one of the richest oil wells in America. There, he will pass by us if I am not quick." And Lewis darted off after the stranger, while Margaret walked on to meet Gertrude.

If the king of the forest ever can look unkingly, unheroic, and hopelessly disconcerted, the unfortunate American lion had an excuse for doing so. Lewis swooped down upon him as he was walking along, absorbed in meditation, and interrupted his dreams of his native woods by saying—

“Erskine, here are the niece and the daughter of the Doctor Halton you have a letter to. I’ll introduce you at once.”

“Dr. Halton? his daughter and his niece?” said the startled wanderer as soon as he could speak. “No, no; not now; some other time.”

But Lewis was deaf to remonstrance, and brought him to the ladies, looking, in spite of his broad shoulders and huge brown beard, as hopeless and helpless as a lamb before the butcher.

“Mrs. Evanshaw, may I present to you my friend, Mr. Erskine Sumner? We were fellow-travellers some time ago. Miss Cressingham—Mr. Sumner.”

The lion roared a stifled growl of the sucking-dove type, which being too much smothered in his beard to resemble human speech, Margaret charitably supposed to be his expression of grateful pleasure. And Lewis continued,—

“Mr. Sumner went with Colonel Wenham, Dr. Halton’s friend and correspondent, to the old copper mines of the Indians near Lake

Superior. I think Dr. Halton has read a pamphlet that Colonel Wenham wrote on the subject."

"Oh yes; and he will be delighted to hear further details of the expedition from Mr. Sumner," said Mrs. Evanshaw; and she graciously asked the lion half a dozen questions, which sufficiently showed him she had never looked into the pamphlet in question, or heard of the copper mines, and to which he contented himself by replying in sundry monosyllabic growls of dissent. Finally, however, as it appeared he had already forwarded his letter of introduction to Dr. Halton, it was settled, through the persistency of Lewis, that he should at once accompany them to Murchison Square; and they turned their steps in that direction, Grahame manœuvring so well that Mrs. Evanshaw walked on first with the unwilling captive, while himself he talked of the election with Margaret at a long distance behind, until they reached the house.

They were shown into the library. Florence was there. Her eyes sparkled and her

cheek glowed with an unwonted flush as she recognised Grahame's voice in the hall; but these tokens of pleasure disappeared when she saw Margaret enter the room with him.

"Where's mamma?" asked Gertrude. "In the drawing-room? Florence, this is Mr. Sumner, a friend of Colonel Wenham who went to the mines. Come, Mr. Grahame;" and Mrs. Evanshaw, Lewis, and Margaret left the room to look for Dr. and Mrs. Halton.

Florence turned to the new comer with a smile of genuine pleasure.

"My father will be very pleased indeed. He received Colonel Wenham's letter just now, and he said he would write to you this afternoon. Did you go with Colonel Wenham on his first expedition?"

"No; only on the second trip a year ago," answered Mr. Sumner, who soon lost his uncomfortable bashfulness under so kind and simple a welcome. "I had a month's holiday, and I did not care to go again to the Cheyenne country, where I had been, so I thought I might as well go with him."

"Did you go with him up to the Athabasca Lake?" asked Florence, with increasing interest.

"No; that would have been too much of a treat. It would have kept me too long from my people."

"Your people? What were they doing? Excavating?" asked Florence so innocently, that Mr. Sumner laughed outright.

"No; not exactly; and yet we certainly do dig holes enough. It is oil. You have heard of the oil springs, have you not?"

"Oh, yes; tell me all about them," said Florence, as forgetful as a child of everything but her own interest in the subject; and Mr. Sumner was deep in a scientific and technical lecture, when Margaret and Gertrude returned, bringing Dr. Theodore, who came full of hearty welcome and great curiosity about Colonel Wenham's late discoveries. Margaret was too busy discussing Sir Henry Churchill's political principles with Lewis to care for the mines or Colonel Wenham. She went to the further end of the room, and beckoned Grahame to follow her;

and they sat there, comparing enlightened Conservatism with diluted Radicalism ; while Dr. Theodore revelled in mineralogico-archæology, and catechised the American on the geography of the lately explored region, rolling out the deep gutturals of Algonquin and Huron nomenclature, as if they added zest to the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties. Florence was a respectful listener to her father, but every now and then she glanced towards Margaret and Grahame ; and as often as she looked at them Mr. Sumner looked too, and as her attention to her father diminished, so did his in like proportion, till at last, Dr. Theodore, mildest mannered man that he was, waxed indignant.

“ Do you mean argentiferous, sir, when you say ferruginous ? ” he asked testily. “ Because there are important questions depending on that very point.”

“ Oh, I meant ferruginous of course. It was a *lapsus linguæ*,” said Mr. Sumner apologetically. “ I did not mean to say argentiferous.”

“ Well then, sir, permit me to say you

have arrived at a perfectly different conclusion to Colonel Wenham. He found the ore singularly combined with silver; and in that fact, and in the manner in which the silver was blended with the copper, lies the distinctive character of the metal in the mines you visited."

Dr. Halton's extreme irritation recalled Florence to herself, and she tried to retrieve matters.

"Mr. Sumner did not quite understand you, papa. He has not read the discussion on Colonel Wenham's pamphlet," and she looked at Mr. Sumner half-reproachfully, half-beseechingly as she spoke, as if to entreat him to pay more respect to her father's feelings.

He took the hint, and turning his back on the conversation going on near the window, gave his whole attention to reinstating himself in Dr. Halton's good opinion; and succeeded so well that he was invited to dine with him, and meet the President of the Metallurgical Society on the morrow.

"I wish your father had not asked them

to dinner," said Mrs. Halton to Gertrude. "Edward will come home from the north to-morrow, wanting to talk to Margaret about business, and he will be sorry to find strangers here."

"He must do his talking to Margaret before dinner, then," Gertrude replied. "Robert and I shall come in, in the evening, to hear these learned folks discourse."

"Robert and you must dine here of course; you know you must," said her mother. "I won't have a dinner party without you. And Margaret is going to the Botanic Gardens to-morrow afternoon with Florence and Mr. Grahame."

"No; I shall stay to hear what Edward has to say; so you can count on me all the afternoon," Margaret replied, as she placed her aunt's basket of wools beside her. "I will write and tell Mr. Grahame we cannot go to the gardens."

"Ask him to come in to-morrow evening, and then he will not mind," said Gertrude. "It is only Florrie who will be disappointed."

Florence however made no objection. She

had no wish to go to the gardens with Lewis and Margaret, and May stayed at home to meet Edward. He came in, tired certainly, and inclined to grumble at the news that there were people to dinner; but when it was demonstrated to him that he had two hours to spare before dressing, and that till then he had nothing to do but sit in an armchair and rest, unless he liked to give an account of his work to May, he confessed his vexation was unreasonable, and submitted with a cheerful grace. He had much to tell Margaret. He had got rid of Cheate, found an honest man, he believed, to take care of the farm, and directed a respectable land agent to advertise it. He had done the business well and expeditiously, and May was very grateful for his zeal; and when she left him to dress for dinner, it was with the feeling she had found a friend at last in him.

They were but a small party at dinner, and gathered round an unostentatious square table. Mrs. Halton and the President of the Metallurgical sat at the top, and Edward sat next the President, to relieve his mother of

the fatigue of entertaining him, while Robert was placed opposite Edward for the same kind reason. Florence sat between Robert and her father, who put Gertrude on his right hand, Mr. Sumner being on hers, and Margaret next to him.

The conversation was eminently instructive, as might be expected. The Metallurgical gentleman had many questions and observations prepared for Mr. Sumner, and as he was unfortunately afflicted with his former fit of monosyllabic gravity, the learned President had it all his own way. Mr. Sumner's bashfulness distressed Gertrude. She tried him upon every topic she thought likely to interest him, but could not draw him into any conversation that involved more than a polite assent or a short answer to a direct question, and she grew weary of the task. Edward could hold his own in any conversation, and talked mineralogy to the man of science sitting by his mother, and politics with Margaret, almost in the same breath. But, as a whole, the dinner was dull. Robert was bored, and Gertrude looked impatiently

at her mother before the dessert had been on the table a quarter of an hour, till Mrs. Halton nodded assent, and the ladies filed out. They had had barely time to complain to each other of the dulness of the last hour, when Lewis Grahame and Mr. Duncombe arrived and put their melancholy to flight.

"Erskine Sumner dull; is it possible?" said Lewis. "Then he must have fallen into one of his old fits of misanthropy. It will wear off soon enough. He is generally very companionable, though not much of a talker. You ought to have found him entertaining. I wish I had been there to have made him talk about his adventures in China."

"Was he ever in China?" asked Mr. Duncombe quickly.

"It was not China proper, but the Malay islands. He was there three years in prison. He has had awful adventures. He told me of his escapes one night as we were sitting by our watchfire out on the prairie, and I assure you I felt the hair rise on my head."

"Was there any wind blowing at the time," Margaret asked with mock gravity.

"Yes ; I daresay there was, Miss Cressingham, since you are so cruelly sceptical. It was a queer story, however ; and when I tell you we were not quite sure that the Cheyennes were not going to attack us, you will perhaps see that it lost none of its horrors. On the whole, though, I think it was rather a satisfaction to me to find I was in company with a man who had passed through so many hairbreadth escapes, since it was plain he had some lucky star, or a guardian angel to protect him, and might therefore get through further risks, and bring me through with him."

"I have not heard of your dangers among the Indians. Pray tell me about them," said Gertrude.

"Oh, we were *quittés pour la peur*. It is not worth the telling. I will tell you some time if you like ; but Miss Cressingham and Miss Halton have heard it once too often. Now I shall try and make Sumner tell you part of his story." In pursuance of which intention Lewis followed Mr. Sumner into the back-room, where he withdrew with a

newspaper as soon as he came upstairs, and forced him back into the general circle.

"Mrs. Evanshaw is thoroughly tired of your dry scientific theories, Sumner. You must tell us of something in America, which has no connection, however remote, with minerals or metals either. Are metals no longer included in the mineral kingdom, Miss Cressingham? I hear of the Mineralogical and Metallurgical Societies as if there were a necessary opposition between the two."

"The Metallurgical is a new one, and claims to be more scientific than ours," said Margaret. "I say 'ours,' because the Mineralogists are polite enough to invite ladies to hear their discussions, and the others will not; so we naturally feel more interest in the one society than the other."

"Of course you do. I shall join the Mineralogical, but to-night I am sure you have heard enough of either metals or minerals. You want something more interesting. Erskine, Mrs. Evanshaw is most anxious to hear the story of your escape from the pirates."

Mr. Sumner looked so vexed and unpro-

pitious that Gertrude regretted Grahame's speech, but she felt obliged to second it, with a request that he would relate his adventures.

"It is not worth telling; Grahame can tell it much better than I can," replied Mr. Sumner. "You should ask him."

"I daresay he knows it much better than you do," Gertrude said, smiling so sweetly that it was impossible for Mr. Sumner to resist longer. "But the pleasure will be in hearing you tell it."

"But there's nothing to tell," he said reluctantly. "Grahame, it is very unfair of you to begin my story in this way, and then leave me to finish it, when you know I can't string two words together."

"Well, I'll begin it for you, and tell it while you collect your ideas; and then you can go on. Mrs. Evanshaw, Mr. Sumner was going to China——"

"No; coming back," broke in Mr. Sumner. "And we were taken by Malay pirates, and carried into one of their villages, I and my father, and thrown into their prison. They

said we were to be marched up into the interior, and be put to death there, to revenge the execution of some of their chiefs by an American captain; but they so nearly starved us before starting that——”

“Oh, but I want all the first part of the story, before you got among the pirates,” said Lewis. “That is what I have been expatiating on.”

“Will you let me tell my tale as I like now I have begun?” said Mr. Sumner. And his smile won Gertrude’s heart, as hers had his, in a moment, and made her forget all his dulness at dinner-time; and she found no cause to regret his taking his own way in relating his adventures, for although he forebore to dwell on horrible details, the story was sufficiently thrilling to be very exciting to them all. He had seen his father languishing in a loathsome dungeon, nearly starved, and exposed to wanton insult and cruelty by his barbarian gaolers. He had been separated from him, and kept in long uncertainty as to his fate; and had tried to make his own escape, but been foiled by a cruel accident, and brought back to his prison, bound, and in hourly expectation of

death by torture. His hearers listened to his story with breathless interest, so carried away by his narrative, that, as Gertrude said afterwards, they barely remembered that his adventures must have come to a good end, and the narrator found a happy issue out of his afflictions.

"I think you were all disappointed that he was not roasted alive at the end of the story," said Edward, after Sumner and the other guests had departed. "You evidently expected that conclusion."

"No, we did not quite. But it was so dreadful, you would have felt so too if you had been listening."

"Daresay I should, if I had been in his place; but I don't feel much for danger second hand, nor I suppose, does any man. You women seem to."

For the next fortnight Dr. Theodore kept open house for all his learned and semi-learned friends.

"One might as well live in an hotel as here," grumbled Edward to Mrs. Evanshaw. "My father's long residence abroad has made him

quite unfit for a quiet English life. I shall go into lodgings if this lasts."

"I would take you home with me," said his sister, "only we are as bad. But you must remember that they don't all come for papa. Lewis Grahame and Mr. Duncombe I am sure, come for Margaret."

But that view of the case seemed to increase Edward's ill-humour, and Gertrude could not get him to smile again.

CHAPTER XII.

SCIENCE MADE EASY.

WHETHER he found the guests an infliction or not, Edward saw that Florence no longer enjoyed the evening amusements. She was silent and thoughtful, and talked to no one unless Mr. Sumner came to her, finding perhaps her quiet conversation more to his taste than the lively chatter of Mrs. Evanshaw and Annabella, or the magnificent graciousness of Mrs. John Halton. As for Miss Cressingham, she was always monopolised by Grahame or by Edward. When one was called away from her, the other immediately filled his place; and even when Dr. Theodore made her devote herself to some of his more distinguished guests, Lewis took his place by her chair, or stood near her, as if he cared to be nowhere else. His admiration was easily seen by all of them but Margaret herself; but she had accepted him so completely as her old companion, that she took his devotion as a matter

of course, and believed he was constant in his liking for Florence.

"Florrie, you should not run away from us," she said one day, when, having vainly sought her cousin everywhere, she found her in her own room, bending over a piece of needlework. "We all want you downstairs. Lewis Grahame is here."

"I don't want to come down. You and mamma can do the agreeable," said Florence without looking up.

"I dare say we can if we try ; but we shall not be so acceptable to Mr. Grahame as you would be," said Margaret, laughing.

"Indeed, he does not care, so long as he can talk to you and Gertrude," said Florence, with a little laugh, but it was no true laugh, and May saw with surprise a tear fall on her work. It had never occurred to her that Florence could care for Grahame, and still less, that his friendship for herself, which she regarded as only natural, could cause her cousin uneasiness. But it was evident now that Florrie did care for him, and that she was unhappy at his bestowing so much of

his attention elsewhere. And May quickly determined to keep away from him, and leave him at liberty to devote himself where he was so much appreciated. She knelt down playfully at Florrie's knee, so as to look into her face, which was sad and troubled enough.

"You should not leave people on my hands to amuse, if you like them to talk to you," she said merrily. "I cannot help doing my best to amuse them, and especially an old play-fellow like Lewis."

"I don't care to talk to him," said Florence under her breath. "And he wants to talk to you."

"He does not care to talk to me more than to you. I do not think he knows which of us he speaks to, but he chats to me most, because we were children together. His mother was very kind to me."

"Oh, I know; he told me that long ago," said Florence, rising with a determination to have no confidences. "He used to talk a great deal about you before you came."

"Did he?" cried Margaret in alarm. "What did he say?"

The tone in which she spoke made Florence turn round to look at her, and with the quickness of jealousy translate her alarm into an admission that there had been some talk of love between her and Lewis in the old Sandmouth time.

"He has not told us anything," she replied stiffly. "We knew you were old friends; but we did not imagine anything else."

Margaret, as her fears were dispelled, could not forbear smiling at the absurdity of Florrie's mistake. "There was never anything else," she replied quietly. "Lewis would be the last person in the world I could care for as a lover."

"Not Lewis? Margaret!" and Florrie's face changed so suddenly in expression that Margaret could not help saying, "Poor child! what nonsense!" And then as suddenly changing her tone to one of playful banter, she added, "I shall begin to think you are half in love with him yourself." Florence laughed; but Margaret could see she was half crying, and she left her to recover her composure as she could, and went away to

reflect very uncomfortably on what she had learned.

"It is no joke; she really likes him. But what could have put it into her head to be jealous of me? I trust he is not wasting his thoughts on me. Poor Lewis, if it were so!"

On reflection, Margaret feared that Florrie's jealousy was not so absurd as she had at first thought it, for Lewis certainly preferred her society on every occasion; and with Sir Henry Churchill in her memory, she saw she was acting foolishly, if not wrongly, in allowing him to be so friendly with her as he now was, unless he knew her real position.

"But I cannot let him know it," she thought. "I cannot sink in his good opinion so utterly as I know I should, if he knew I had been such a mad fool; and to have to tell him that Jesse, the groom, the sailor, is my husband, and may come back! No, no; I cannot. I will not." And yet it was a serious question. She feared she was acting cruelly to Lewis himself, as well as to Florence, by keeping her confidence from him; and yet she still shrank from making this confidence as from a most bitter humilia-

tion. He had so utterly looked down on Jesse as a common peasant, that she could not, she thought, bring herself to tell him that she had married that man, and that he was now a convict in prison. Yet Florrie's peace of mind was involved, and perhaps Grahame's too would be hazarded by her silence. She recognised now that he continually sought her sympathy on every subject, and she feared she ought to speak. Several times during a sleepless night, she resolved to do so, and again gave up her resolve; and she was still quite uncertain what she should do when the morning came, and she knew she would have to meet Lewis at luncheon. She almost thought of running away from the interview.

Florence also was in a feverish state of excitement all the morning. She was glad to know her cousin did not care for Grahame; but she could not deceive herself with any hope that he did not love Margaret. She accepted his slight to herself with perfect resignation; she did not dispute his good sense in preferring May; she had made an

oracle of him, and was ready to submit to his judgment. He had decided Margaret was the more worthy of them, and she felt he was right, and suffered in a sense of deep and she thought deserved humiliation. It was a pain now to her to see him, and she was considering with herself whether she could avoid doing so without attracting observation and betraying her own wretchedness, when a note from Grahame was brought in to Mrs. Halton. Aunt Alice read it through twice in silence, and in evident surprise.

"He has sudden business in the city, and cannot come," she said. "And he says something about being obliged to go down to the north so that he cannot come next Tuesday to dinner. It is very sudden; I hope it is nothing wrong."

Never were tidings more welcome to three at least of the company. Edward positively smiled, Margaret drew a long breath of relief, and Florence, with a sigh, told herself she was glad. Lewis had gone just when his presence was very painful to them all, and yet no one could be content to accept his disappearance quietly

and thankfully ; but they must needs wonder at it, and exhaust themselves in fruitless conjectures with Gertrude and Robert who came in, bringing Mr. Sumner, and who, having no reason to be thankful for Mr. Grahame's absence, expressed their regret and surprise aloud.

Two old friends of Dr. Halton's also came in, and papers were read and specimens handed about, and Lewis was forgotten by all but Florence, who sat apart and listless, until Mr. Sumner came to her, and succeeded in interesting her in conversation.

"What do those two find to talk about?" said Gertrude, looking at them. "Is it philosophy or science, or is it that greater philosophy that comprehends every other in the minds of those who are cultivating it, and makes them so ridiculous to all lookers on?"

"No; I am quite sure it is not that," said Margaret, who had been listening to their conversation, attracted possibly by the charm that all earnest tones have for children and idle people. "I am sure it is not that philosophy as you call it. But how

dare you speak so slightly of it, Gertrude, —you who have been in love yourself, and half in love, at least a dozen times ?”

“All the more reason why I should recognise its folly. And as for you, Margaret, you have no right to judge *ex cathedrâ* of our feelings; for as you are not as weak-hearted as other mortals, you cannot form any opinion on the subject.”

“But I have listened to all your confidences, Gerty, and I think that should count for experience,” said May, laughing.

Gertrude answered her laugh; but looking towards Mr. Sumner and Florence, became aware that they had ceased talking, and were listening.

“Well, what do you think on the subject ?” Mrs. Evanshaw asked, trying to break the rather awkward silence.

“What amount of second-hand information will supply the place of experience ?” said Mr. Sumner. “Can Miss Cressingham give us any approximate idea ?”

“It depends on the power we possess of sympathising with our fellow-creatures,” said

May, with much seriousness. "Human nature being the same everywhere, with but few variations, and those variations being all reducible to rule, you may acquire an accurate knowledge of the subject if you only study examples enough."

Mr. Sumner looked grave, as if the tone of levity Margaret had assumed jarred on his ear, and he bestowed such a scrutinizing glance on her, that she felt the colour rise to the roots of her hair. His manner and his silence said plainly, "You are acting a part;" and he was turning to Florence, as if preferring to renew his conversation with her, when Dr. Theodore came up and asked him to repeat some details of the expedition among the mines, for him to transcribe for the use of the Mineralogical Society.

Mr. Sumner assented readily, pen and paper were produced, and Florence installed as scribe, and much instructive matter committed to paper, until in an unwary burst of enthusiasm, prompted perhaps by a desire of pleasing Florence or her father, Mr. Sumner was rash enough to opine that he might

perhaps give the latter the material for a good lecture, which proposition was received by Dr. Halton with rapture.

"You could, indeed, my dear sir. You must write it yourself, and you shall read it at the Mineralogical next month. It will be a capital subject; you will treat it admirably, and I will help you."

"Poor Mr. Sumner!" said Gertrude *sotto voce* to Margaret. "And poor-mamma! Now he will never be out of the house. That lecture will occupy papa for three weeks before he has patted it into shape. If Mr. Sumner were wise, he would write it all out at once, and go off for a trip to Paris while papa corrects it."

"You will find me at home at eleven every morning in the library," said Dr. Theodore to Sumner. "You can use my library as if it were your own; and I have maps and books of reference at your disposal. Come to-morrow morning. These ladies will be all out shopping, and we shall be undisturbed."

"I wonder what papa would say if Florence went out shopping every morning, instead of

waiting on him in the library," whispered Gertrude to May. "Ingratitude, thy name is man—and especially papa."

Mr. Sumner averred that he was due at an appointment at eleven the next morning; but he would, with Dr. Theodore's permission, come in the evening. Which observation seemed to show he was not afraid that the presence of the ladies would interfere with his work.

"Mind you come, Gerty, and Robert too," said Margaret aside.

"I can't, for Mr. Duncombe dines with us," Gertrude answered; "unless mamma will ask him to accompany us. She must do so, for I want to be by while Mr. Sumner tries to read his paper to papa, and papa criticises it."

Mrs. Halton gave the required invitation to Mr. Duncombe, and by a little after eight, Mr. and Mrs. Evanshaw, with their guest, arrived at Murchison Square, and entered the library where Dr. Halton was already discoursing with Erskine Sumner. Mrs. Halton sat knitting a sofa cover, and Florence was pretending to read, while in reality, waiting upon her father as Gertrude had said, being

called upon every three minutes for an opinion, or for sympathy, or asked to find a book he could not lay his hands on. Edward also made continual demands on Florrie, showing her prints and diagrams, apparently interesting himself deeply in some new patent, but glancing off ever and again towards Margaret who was at the other end of the room reading.

"You are just come in time, my love," said Dr. Theodore to Gertrude. "Mr. Duncombe, sir, I am glad to see you. Pray sit down, Robert. Mr. Sumner is going to read us the first draft of his lecture,—only the first draft you understand. Mr. Sumner, will you begin. It is to be read before the Mineralogical, Gertrude."

"Why not before the Metallurgical?" asked Mrs. Evanshaw, trying to affect some interest in the subject.

"Why, because the Metallurgical will not admit ladies to its meetings, you know; and Mr. Sumner of course would like you all to hear what he is going to write. Pray now, Mr. Sumner, let us hear it."

"But it is not ready for reading. I have written nothing as yet but the mere heads of it," said the unfortunate author, somewhat embarrassed; "and there is no arrangement. It would not interest the ladies at all."

But Dr. Halton poohpoohed this suggestion; and Sumner, having once opened his manuscript, began to read with a sufficient amount of assurance. He read fast, and had actually got through two paragraphs before Dr. Halton challenged his facts.

"I think you are wrong as to the longitude, and I am certain the British Association never endorsed the theory to which you allude, nor any other scientific body in Europe, as far as I am aware."

"I think the British Association did in 1850," said Mr. Sumner, who was not by any means as disconcerted as he ought to have been. Dr. Halton produced some bound volumes of reports, and triumphantly and severely showed him his error; but Sumner bore his reproaches cheerfully, turned round to the inkstand, took a pen, and drew it

through the offending passages; and then calmly began to read again. He was soon stopped as before, and as he this time defended himself, a long argument ensued, during which the attention of the audience was distracted by the arrival of coffee and tea, and various other objects of interest.

“Edward, I approve this acquaintance for papa,” said Mrs. Evanshaw aside to her brother. “It keeps the dear old gentleman happy. I hope it will be many weeks before the lecture is finished. But why does Margaret keep away from us? What is she reading to make her look so sad?”

Margaret did indeed look sad. Her thoughts were occupied with her own false position and possible danger. Was he still in prison, and did he fortunately believe that their hasty marriage was illegal, and that he had no hold on her? Was it not likely that some report of Edward’s ill-advised efforts to learn news of him would reach him, and awaken him to the fact that he could make good his claim. Was he in prison for life? She could not force her mind from this sub-

ject that evening ; she could not listen to the discussion going forward ; her fears had absolute mastery over her ; and if Edward had been near enough to see the expression of her eyes, he would have understood she was more desperate and frightened than sad, as Gertrude said she was. He was watching her however, and wondering if she were fretting at Grahame's absence, and Mr. Duncombe, from behind a book of engravings, was attentively considering her face likewise, unconscious that his interest in Miss Cressingham was the subject of very scrutinising observation from Mr. Sumner. The American stood near a bookcase, half-hidden by its open glass door, and looked now at Margaret, now at Edward, and finally becoming aware of Mr. Duncombe's extreme show of interest in the young lady, rewarded it by a very close study of his physiognomy in turn.

At last Edward settled it to himself that Margaret must not be allowed to think her present thoughts, whatever they were, any longer, and asked,—

"When is the North Suffolk election coming off?"

Margaret knew that he meant to please her, and responded to his kind intention.

"When it does, I shall claim your help. You and Florence must come down to Rawlstone, and we will help him all we can."

"Help in Sir Henry?" said Edward, half-laughing. "You go to Rawlstone while an election is afoot? Why, that is just the reason you should stop away out of mischief."

"Can't you trust me? Do you fear I shall be trampled to death in the crowd below the hustings?" said Margaret. "If I am, you will be so too, for I promise you I will not leave hold of your arm."

Edward laughed with her, but her laugh was checked as she saw Mr. Sumner's look of surprise and disapprobation.

"I am not going to drive about the country with blue ribbons, shaking hands with all the butchers and farmers, I assure you," she said, turning to him. "I leave that to the titled ladies. I shall confine my exertions to

talking to my tenants, and telling them to vote for my candidate."

"Which is all a lady should do," said Edward, approvingly, as the American made no reply.

"But my dear girl," said Dr. Halton, "letting alone the fact that you have but two tenants who are qualified to vote; is not the telling a tenant which way to vote, something very like feudal supremacy and downright tyranny."

"It is the very worst form of tyranny because the most hypocritical," broke in Mr. Sumner, whose republican indignation could no longer be repressed. "It is the most odious form of tyranny,—the tyranny of capital; and it insults the poor man more than any comparison between his poverty and your wealth; for you make his vote as thoroughly your own as the votes of the Southern negroes were their masters, and then have the hypocrisy—the cruel hypocrisy—to say he is under a representative government, and is bound to obey the laws enacted by the man you call his representative. And

nothing has so much astonished me in England as to see women, refined and delicate women, whom one supposes to be less corrupted by party spirit and political animosity than men are, going about during an election amongst the commonest of the population, coaxing, cajoling, and wheedling men whom they look on as dust under their feet, to bribe them to uphold some candidate, often the worst man in the county——”

“And do not American women do the same? Do not they talk to the men who have votes, and try to influence them in favour of the best candidate?” interrupted May indignantly. “You may call it wheedling and coaxing if you like, but women have, as a rule, no other way of helping. When they have tenants——”

“They compel them to vote without coaxing,” answered Sumner, interrupting in turn. “I can hardly believe you know what you say. I have often heard it said that women are more unscrupulous than men in all party questions; that they cannot be conscientious when they interest themselves in political life;

that they have no political morality whatever; but I never realised it until——”

Here he stopped suddenly, either becoming aware that his indignation was carrying him too far, or else too angry to go on.

“Well?” said Margaret coolly, as he stopped; but as he did not go on, her own indignation found words, and she answered,—

“I will tell you why they have no political morality (since that is the word), nor any conscience, nor any regard for justice, nor any respect for law when they can evade it; for I know all those charges are brought against us. They may be,—if they were true, we should be perfectly justified. We are treated as the Southern negroes were: denied all political understanding or power, we cannot choose the man who is to represent our interest, or make laws affecting us; denied all justice when our interests come into collision with those of men; systematically oppressed by the laws which men send representatives to make, to advantage themselves against women, and never to protect them. That is the reason. There is hardly a law in the

country that does not press heavier on a woman than on men. There is not a single law to protect her in preference to a man, because she is more helpless. And while we find by bitter experience what justice and representative government mean, as interpreted by English men, you blame women because they do not, you say, understand political morality, or respect the majesty of law, as if they were things you wanted us to recognise as a possibility, or believe in."

"Then you opine," said Dr. Halton, "that while the law makes a woman the absolute property of her husband when she is married, and deprives her of the privileges of citizenship when she is unmarried and without a protector, it is not to be wondered at if women, as a whole, feel but little respect for law, or think much of the conscience and morality of the men who made it."

Margaret nodded assent. Mr. Sumner had walked to the other end of the room, as if ashamed of his late outbreak; but Mr. Duncombe, after a minute's silence, remarked,—

"I do not quite agree with you, Miss Cressingham, when you say that the law is harder on women than men. For all offences they are judged alike and punished alike."

"Are they?" answered Margaret. "Are women tried by their peers when only men are in the jury-box? Are they punished alike? Look here in to-day's newspaper. Here is a woman sentenced to death for poisoning a drunken husband; and here, meantime, is a man sent to penal servitude for life for beating and kicking his wife till he killed her. Are they punished alike?"

"I think you draw an unfair conclusion," said Dr. Theodore, mildly. "In the one case there was premeditated murder, and in the other not. It was only homicide. I admit with you that the marriage law is very unfair towards the woman in respect to her property, and the absolute control it gives the husband over her."

"Yes," said Margaret, unable to repress a shudder; "a man has an absolute right to drink himself half mad, and ill-treat and half

kill a woman as long as he does not quite murder her; and, if he does that, he is tried by a jury of other men——”

“Who have no sympathy for him, or misjudged mercy for his brutality,” interrupted Edward. “Really, Margaret, you have no knowledge of human nature. Men are not all brutes, I assure you. And the marriage laws were made for a protection to women; and, as a whole, work well. It is only now and then an exception occurs, and you hear the most of it.”

“And as to the question of property, it is often the man who has the worst of it,” said Mr. Duncombe. “A hardworking man may be ruined, even imprisoned for the debts of an extravagant wife; and, on the other hand, she may have money settled on herself, and he may starve, and cannot touch it.”

“Pray let me show you the reverse of the medal,” said Margaret, losing all command of herself for a moment. “I know a woman at this moment, a lady by birth and by education, a woman of refinement and delicacy as you said, who is now tortured by the

constant fear that her husband, whom she has not heard of for many years, may return to her, and, because she has the means of supporting him in idleness, claim her as his wife and his property; and the law will give him the right to come and say he is her master. And what would be the fate of a woman who was poor and friendless? The woman I speak of has friends, who, having no respect for law, and having money, will protect her; and, if not, she would die sooner than submit to what is called justice by English men; but if she were poor and friendless, and feared death or loved life, what would be her fate when this man, who is called her natural protector, comes back. What of the women who suffer in silence because they have no friends?"

Margaret had hurried on, borne away by long pent-up excitement, and only as she paused to take breath, found that every one in the room had ceased speaking, and was listening to her in astonishment or perplexity. Dr. Halton kept his eyes steadily fixed on the carpet, as if he feared to look any one in the

face, and Edward began taking books out of the shelves with as much noise as he could; but she was startled when she perceived the deep attention with which Mr. Sumner was regarding her, and the eager, scrutinising gaze Mr. Duncombe fastened on her face. Edward saw this also, and mentally cursed her imprudence. He dropped the volumes he held in his hand, and called on her for assistance. "What fury possesses you?" he whispered. "They will guess it all." And he glanced at Duncombe, who was making an effort to smooth his dark features into a smile, and appear interested in Mrs. Halton's knitting. Mr. Sumner, less able to change his thoughts, or less anxious to conceal them, still sat frowning and serious.

Margaret talked of the books and the bookshelves, and then of the election, and of Robert's wish to go to Italy, and did all in her power to make them forget her indiscreet speech. She hoped she had succeeded, but she was mistaken, for as Duncombe was going away, he said in a low tone, intended to be heard by no one but herself,—

“Is the lady you spoke of a personal friend? Her story was very sad?”

“Very sad, but too true,” she answered, now on her guard. “The husband drinks; it is a bad case.”

Duncombe bowed, and took leave. Edward went with him to the door and then returned. May caught his eye, and read reproach in it.

“I could not help,” she whispered, as she came nearer to him. “I was thinking of Clara Hathaway.”

“Oh; of Clara, was it?” Edward answered, in a tone so unintentionally incredulous, that Margaret felt her cheeks glow with confusion. “Well then, you should be careful for her sake,” he continued; “and most of all for your own. I can see both Duncombe and Sumner suspect; and Quillett, you know, says you cannot be too careful.”

Margaret remembered that Mr. Quillett's chief caution had been against Edward's energy in making inquiries after Freeman; but she could not remind Edward of this, so she was silent. Mr. Sumner now took his leave, and

as he and Edward went into the hall, Edward thought it well to observe,—

“I am afraid you found us all rather melancholy to-night. My mother is not well, and Miss Cressingham much depressed about her friend, who is very anxious and unhappy.”

“It is a very common case,” said Mr. Sumner. “May I ask if you have known Mr. Duncombe long?”

“No. But Mr. Evanshaw has,” replied Edward, who did not, however, feel any too confident of that fact.

“I have seen him before,” said Sumner. “I think it was in San Francisco. He seems singularly interested in your cousin, and in all of you.”

Mr. Sumner's tone said as plainly as words could have done: “Have a care of him;” and Edward's look responded to the tone, but he made no comment aloud. Sumner wished him good-night, and went away. Margaret was standing near the library door, and when Edward came back, she asked,—

“What was it? Anything about Mr. Duncombe.”

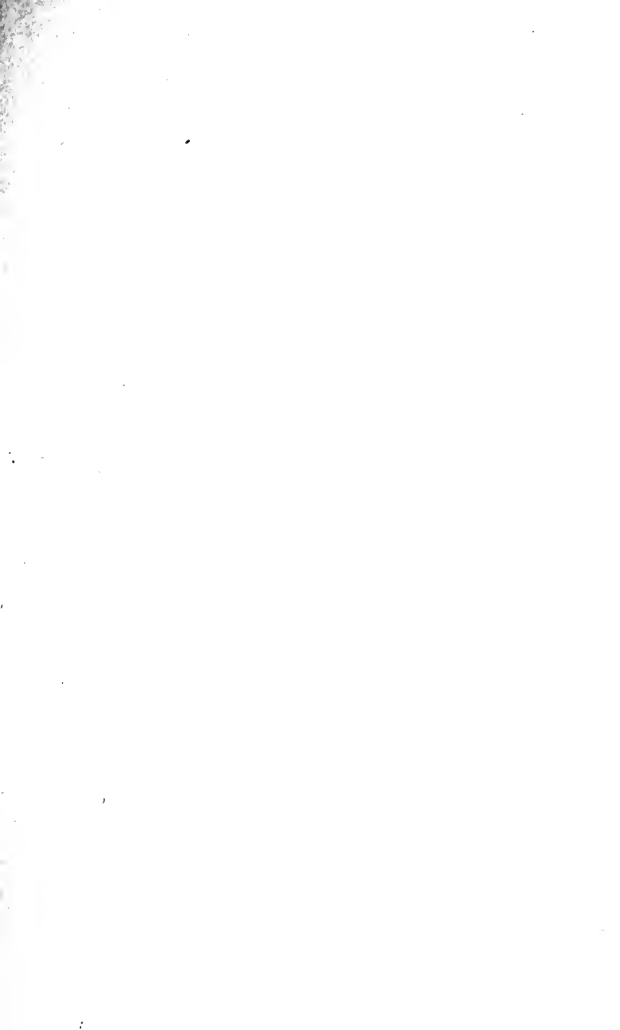
"He says he has seen him in San Francisco, and I should think he knows something not to his credit," Edward replied. "I don't like him at all. I must ask Robert how he came across him. He has a most deplorable habit of taking up with any chance comer who happens to fall foul of him."

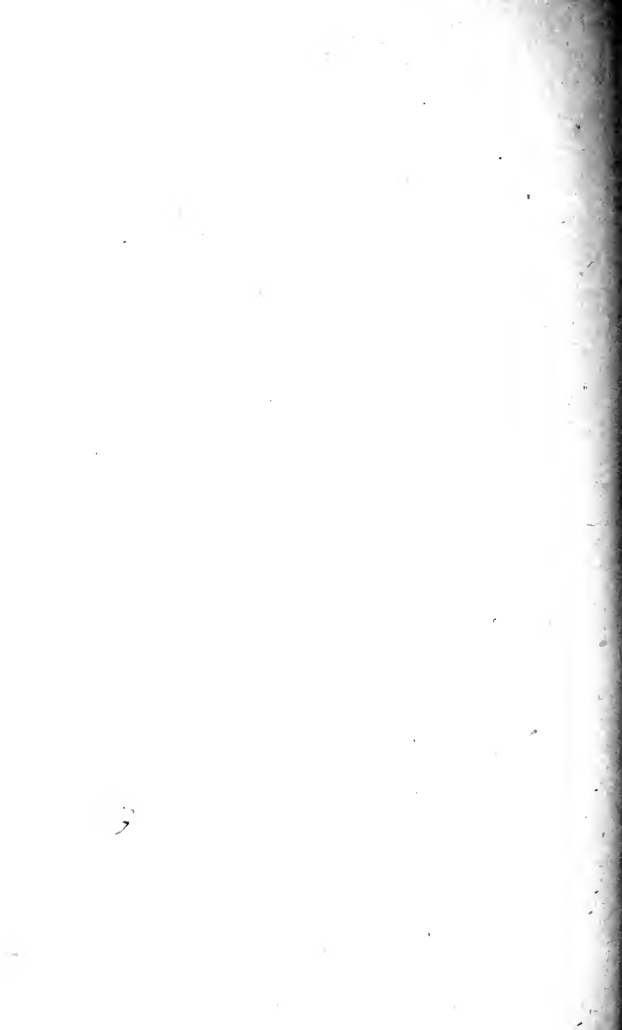
"And some one else has a praiseworthy habit of listening to defamatory reports from any other chance comer who has a letter of introduction to us," said May, laughing. "I think before you let Mr. Sumner destroy poor Mr. Duncombe's character, you should learn more about Mr. Sumner himself."

"Well, we easily can, for there is another Yankee hove in sight," Edward replied. "My father has had a second letter from his precious Colonel in the mines, and another American is coming. One of the most remarkable men of the time, of course, and he is sure to know Sumner. They all of them say they know each other, and this man is something special in the social reformer line, and a geologist of course; but he is *chargé d'affaires* for Naples, so I suppose he is respectable."

“Better ask Mr. Sumner about him,” May replied, laughing again; but it was a forced laugh, and Edward saw she had not recovered from the painful excitement of the late conversation; and he made no answer.

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